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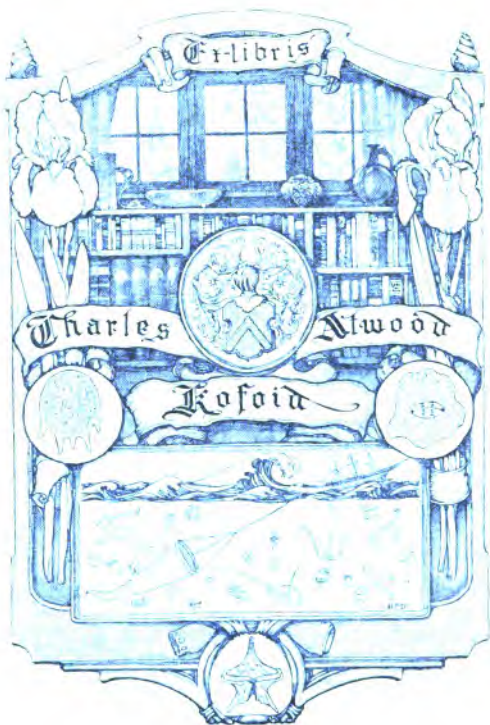
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Off the Beaten Track

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Off the Beaten Track

BY

F. ST MARS

Author of 'The Wild Unmasked,' 'Pinion and Paw,'
and 'Snapshots of the Wild'

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Off the Beaten Track.

THE SILENCER.

YOUNG FOWLEY stood looking out over the winking, cold flats, over the blaze of the setting sun, over the steely pools, over the snaky channel, toward the wild, lone, weirdly crying wild-fowl, and the blue-gray haze above the marshes touched with rose from that faintly pink sky that betokens frost.

A smudge that was wild-duck slid down out of the haze, and a wedge of geese went 'honking' across. Food! Yes, food—but not for him. A year ago he could have taken his gun and shot 'two couple o' duck,' or, if the weather was hard enough, Old Fowley's punt, with the huge, ten-foot swivel-gun at bow, and, with a little luck and not a little risk, have bagged ten or twenty fat widgeon. And these he could have sold for money; and money was rent; money was clothes; money was food; money was Old Fowley saved from the terror of the workhouse; money was—

Kate! But now he could not touch a bird; he must not fire a shot. He could see, but could not take. It was the law. The new lord of the manor, a cousin of the old lord, and a commercial man from elsewhere, knowing nothing of local conditions, and caring less, had asserted his right to the foreshore, and his lawyer and his money were at the back of him.

This meant that all shooting by the people, either above or below high-water mark, was stopped. It was nothing to him, of course. He had only claimed his own. Before that the people had looked upon it as their ancient right to shoot anywhere below high-water mark, on the ground that the foreshore belonged to the Crown. He had declared them wrong. To many of the local marshmen the wild-fowling season in the winter ranked as their harvest. Wild-fowling was their calling, as it had been the calling of their fathers before them. Take it away, and they would starve. Taken away, then, it was, and the few that were still left, the remnant of a dying race, were starving in silence. They were too proud to ask.

Moreover, it seemed that poaching was out of the question, for the sound of a gun carries far over those silent, wet solitudes, and the

gamekeepers need keep no sharp look-out except with their ears. Any poacher could easily be heard a mile away.

Young Fowley stood stock-still, a low, strong, steely, spare figure in his blue jersey and trousers, that time and the salt wind between them had turned green. He noted that this, the night that was coming, promised to be 'a rare night for fowl,' and he remembered that in other years he and Old Fowley would just about have been getting the punt and the great gun ready for a night's work that might end in the making of a sovereign. And to-night—nothing. Nothing but the few shellfish he had been able to collect on the estuarine mud 'twixt tide and tide—the matter of a few coppers, as you might say. Old Fowley was old—'nigh eighty, Oi reckons ut, sir'—and could 'set to fowl' in his ancient, cigar-shaped, flat-bottomed, gray gunning-punt, and train and fire the 'gurt gun wid tha best on 'em' yet; but tramping about on the estuary at low tide with 'pattens,' or mud-shoes, 'a-careklin' an' a-winklin',' was too much for him—he was beyond that. Young Fowley, therefore, had done his share alone, and sold his catch from door to door. It had bought a loaf, a 'pennuth o' tay, an' old dad's baccy;' but that evening Young Fowley had

distinctly heard the wolf whine at the cottage door, so to speak.

Moreover, crowning calamity of all, he had seen the light in Kate's eyes as he passed her coming out of the general shop. That hard glint was not put there by Cupid. It was the restless, reckless, animal glare of hunger—flame of unspeakable rebellion.

Young Fowley's gaze ran lazily along the half-veiled shore, along the dark line of seaweed running far into the deepening gloom of dusk that marked the line of highest water—and lit on something white. It shone like a chalk-lump in that dimness. Hard it was to tell what it might be. Some wild-duck or white fowl of the sea lying on its back dead or wounded might, Young Fowley knew, occasionally show like that. The desire was father to the expectation; but as he approached it he saw that it was only a book—some flotsam of the ocean stranded there, relic of wreck, pillage of the wind, or result of man's carelessness or waste.

He picked it up, and, always quicker than his fellows and more interested than they in all kinds of learning, idly read the yellow, seared pages as he trudged homeward along the shore with that odd, short, tireless, almost animal stride of all longshoremen.

It was only a gun and rifle dealer's catalogue that he had found, that was all.

The slim, neat, sallow, dark pawnbroker of Harbourworth looked up keenly under his brows as the plate-glass door opened and Young Fowley stepped in softly. His pea-jacket was a little frayed. His peaked cap suggested many careful years. His young face, with that perfect complexion that comes of twenty-one winters spent in the open air, was a little flushed with his six-mile tramp to the town. Even so, he was different from the ordinary marshmen—that vanishing race—but, like them, he carried himself with a strange, shy dignity in this hated place.

The paper bundle under his arm he placed upon the counter and unwrapped with the air of one handling the work of an old master. But it was only his gun that appeared—barrels, fore-end, and stock, in three sections; only his gun, gleaming bar-like gleams in the glare; only his gun, cleaned with the care of a loving hand; only his gun, which had got him and Old Fowley their shared daily bread this many a year. It was almost the only breech-loader on the estuary, and had been left to him, so Old Fowley told him, by some deceased relation who had always remained

nameless. It was a good gun, no trash, and famous, among men who regard guns as treasures, for miles along the country-side.

The pawnbroker lifted his brows, firstly at the name of the maker on the breech-lock, and secondly that a marshman should part with his gun. It was like a gamekeeper parting with his, only more so. It was like a master-musician parting with his violin, an Arab with his horse, an officer with his sword. Such a thing had never been heard of. There was no precedent for the sacrilege. The slim, neat, fallow pawnbroker looked up twice sharply, to make sure Young Fowley was not drunk. Old Fowley, he knew, would as soon think of parting with *his* ponderous, aged muzzle-loader as with his life. Their gun, indeed, is part and parcel of those strange men's existence, and if never used, would still have a value in their eyes greater than all they possessed. No man on that estuary, it seemed, would ever be able to use his gun there again, but none thought of selling. Possibly they each knew secretly, in their own hearts, that no one would buy. They handle some fearsome weapons in those parts; anything more modern than fifty years old is a rarity there, and Young Fowley's gun was alone in that respect.

‘Ow much for ‘er?’ asked Young Fowley, in the soft drawl of his race, flushing, and none too pleased at his own shyness.

‘Four pounds.’

Young Fowley nearly fell over backwards, but he had the sense to pocket his surprise and the money, and to store up the mental note that the man who left him that gun must have paid a good twenty pounds for it.

Then—and then—well, having regard always to the state of the Fowleys’ exchequer at that moment, and to the value that that money would have been to them, the thing which Young Fowley did then might have been regarded as a madness, or it might not. Simply put, he went to the post-office, and changing nearly all his money into postal-orders, enclosed them with a letter which he had brought with him already written, and posted that same. It seemed like a sin, almost a cardinal sin. Goodness alone knows what his own folk would have done to him had they known what he was at at that moment.

The letter was addressed to the firm of gun and rifle dealers in London whose catalogue and price-list he had found washed up along the shore of the estuary that same afternoon.

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The days that immediately followed in that

lonely, forgotten village by the estuary wherein the Fowleys lived were 'days of clouded terror;' when cockles and mussels and winkles were almost fought over out on the freezing, goose-fleshed mud, and even small speared eels were valued as highly as wild-duck had once been; when folk that were old grew suddenly older or died, and folk that were young became old; and when on almost every face grew and spread those cruel, hard lines about the mouth that never quite go away again, and are the mark of hunger; and when in nearly every eye lurked a light, a gleam, furtive, fierce, and horrible to behold—the light you may see any winter, if you know where to look, in the eyes of a hungry beast.

Frost had the land by the throat. Fate had the marshmen of that village by the throat too.

Young Fowley said nothing, and continued to say nothing throughout. He went about sullenly savage and secret, his jaw set, his clever, generally kindly, eye brooding and smouldering. He bore an air of waiting for something. Men said that they found him staring *up* the road towards the distant town, whence the carrier's cart crawled at its appointed times, and not *down* the road towards the estuary, which is the direction in which

every marshman instinctively glances as he leaves his cottage, except he looks up at the sky to forecast the weather.

And yet Young Fowley was not idle. He was, on the contrary, perhaps the smartest of all during that iron-bound week of terror in wringing from the estuary and its mud the little that the new lord of the manor had left folk a right to wring. No cold was too great for him, no semi-frozen slime too treacherous for him to explore. And he was the smartest, too, in selling his pathetically small harvest, in melting the hearts of housewives inland to buy what they little wanted. At high-water, also, he prowled, wolf-like, ceaselessly up and down the tide-line, disputing with the gulls and the gray crows the harvest of the waves, searching for driftwood, wounded sea-birds, and—oh, anything! He did not lie down and breathe ‘Kismet!’ He was not that sort. Defeat, to him, was intolerable, and the thought of it filled him with an uncontrollable, grim fury.

Even so, however, though he did as well as any marshman in those days of torment—better than most, indeed—it was not enough. And he knew it. As he sat by the wood-fire of an evening—because the law no longer allowed him to shoot fowl by day *or* night—eternally

biting his nails, sombrely watching Old Fowley in the flickering firelight—lamp or candle-light was out of the question—he knew it was not enough.

The old man, sitting there bolt-upright in his chair, grim, rugged, unyielding, his strong face set behind the haze of white whiskers, his mouth firm in its square lines, his keen, granite-like, clear gray eyes staring shrewdly, almost fiercely, at the flames—the old man had not spoken. He rarely spoke now; but Young Fowley knew that his strength was ebbing day by day. Even though he never said it, never complained, was ever pottering at some odd jobs, the young man knew that he, Young Fowley, was failing to keep old dad alive. And it seemed to him—for he was of a studious and a reading mind beyond the understanding of his fellows—that many a time during those interminable, bitter evenings of idleness, as he sat listening for the grinding clatter and scrunch of the old carrier's cart, he could hear the wolf come whining to the door, and heave up the bolt with his slaverling, wet, long, lean muzzle, and sniff at the keyhole. But it was only the frozen wind that did that, the searing nor'-easter, which alone, for an hour or two o' nights, broke the breathless, iron-bound stillness.

Four pounds! What would those four pounds, most of which he had sent away, not have done for old dad while they lasted?

He never told Old Fowley that he had pawned his gun. Even he dared not do that. Dad would not understand. Explanation would be useless with him—would drive him to a violent fit of rage. Only by deeds could explanation and understanding be given.

‘Good Gawd! ain’t that there parcel never a-goin’ tu come?’

The whisper wrung itself from Young Fowley’s lips a dozen times in those awful evening wakes. But what if the postal-orders had gone astray? He set his teeth at that like a trapped coyote.

At last the thing came. The carrier’s knock made Old Fowley sit very straight. The sight of the heavy parcel from the railway at the distant town produced from him a heavy, frowning stare. Young Fowley had no money to pay the carrier his threepence, so had to promise payment in fish—God and the weather willing—or winkles, and the carrier stepped back into the bitter black night whence he had come. He was used to strange payment from the marsh folk, and knew their ways as certainly as he knew that they would pay, sooner or later, his full due, or its value.

Young Fowley put the parcel on the table and sat down. He said nothing. Only his eyelids flickered once or twice a little anxiously.

Old Fowley glared at the parcel for a long time with heavy, bent brows. Then he glared at Young Fowley, then at the fire. Once he looked up sharply, and opened his mouth as if to speak, but seemed to think better of it, and dropped back to sucking his empty pipe, coaxing imaginary 'baccy' into it with his blunt forefinger, and staring at the fire. Suddenly, 'Ye ain't bin an' gone an' gotten things as ye ca-an't pay fer, 'ave ye, lad?' fiercely rapped out the old man.

'Ye knaws as I ain't a-done tha-at, dad, dan't ye?' came the answer promptly.

Young Fowley spoke in the soft, slow, dragging drawl of his kind, but there was, there always had been, a subtle difference, somehow; and looking at the pair now in the gleam of the fire, one was struck by how much superficially, and how little really, these two were alike. It seemed also as if the dialect was a little put on by the younger man.

'Then'—Old Fowley's iron, knotted fist came down on the arm of the old wooden chair with a bang—'where the —— did ye get the'—— He stopped. What he would have asked he never said. He glared at

Young Fowley for the space of three long breaths, and, heaving slowly to his feet, went to bed. At the door he paused. 'What time be a-goin' out t'morrer, lad?' he asked.

'Fore light.' Young Fowley was still looking at the fire.

'Igh-water 'bout thart,' the old man reminded him.

Young Fowley nodded.

The door shut, and—Young Fowley was at the parcel on the table in a single bound.

It was not yet light, though it was no longer early in the day. A heavy fog—icy but not damp, dumb, mysterious—held all that world of marsh and water in bondage.

The door of the Fowleys' cottage opened. Young Fowley—in no more than an old jacket to cover his jersey—came out and moved off down the road. He carried his fishing-gear—his eel-spear, his prawning-net, and a sack over his back; and the sack looked heavy.

In the hollow, cold silence the tramp of his heavy sea-boots on the iron-hard road rang back a-magnified; the frozen puddles cracked with the noise of splintered glass beneath his feet as he bent his way shoreward through the village.

'Cour-leep! Cour-leep!'

It was only the call of a wandering curlew somewhere in the fog. The weird, desolate cry pealed dismally through the murk. And Young Fowley stopped dead 'twixt stride and stride.

Then a gate clicked somewhere unseen, and a dim form crossed the road towards him and stopped. It was Kate, with an apron over her head; a shortish, thick-set, flat-faced girl, with reddish-brown hair, slightly almond-shaped eyes, and a heavy, sensuous mouth. A girl not good-looking, but calculated to make men do strange things—a rather fairer specimen than usual of this strange dying race of marshmen, whose slow-footed, stolid, slow-tongued, rather strange women-folk are the very opposite to the strong, proud, quick, lithe, silent, soft-voiced, and usually lightly built men.

‘I knawed as ye’d be a-comin’ down ’bout flood,’ she said, and the slow drawl of her voice echoed hollowly back from the harsh wall of some cottage unseen, as a voice on the road will sometimes in great cold. ‘Not a-goin’ poachin’, be ye?’ she exclaimed suddenly, quickly.

Young Fowley said nothing, and Kate went on, coming close to him and speaking swiftly in whispers, almost as if she feared that tell-

tale echo. And all the time the light of starvation shone in her eyes, and her harsh voice, which even when whispered preserved that hoarseness noticeable in the voice of so many girls of her class, sounded like the snarl of a she-beast.

Her words few would understand, for they speak a strange *patois* in those parts, dragging half their words out like molasses, and eating the rest; but what she meant was plain. Indeed, you could see it written on her face. She was starving; her mother was starving; her father nearly so. She must live somehow. Young Alf, under-keeper up at the Manor, had offered to take her, and find food for the rest. He was a traitor, a marsh lad who had found employment with the enemy. But he had the money—tips and wages were more than enough for the purpose. Beyond that, she was not breaking the unwritten law of her race, that forbids their girls to seek other husbands than marshmen.

Young Fowley knew the customs of the people. He stood looking at the ground with shrewd, calculating eyes while she talked. Here was no boorish incompetence. He heard her out, then looked up. He handed her sixpence. She laughed. There was a world of meaning in that laugh. He knew it, and

smiled too. Then, 'Wait till I come ashore just arter flight-time t'night,' he said. It was a command, not the entreaty of a supplicating lover, and Kate caught her breath in spite of herself, trying to remember where and when before she had seen and heard a man—not a marshman—look and speak just like that. 'Then, if ye wants to, yer can do ut,' he finished; and, suddenly, as an afterthought, 'Ye ain't seen us, Kate, and dan't knaws where I be.' And before she could answer he had kissed her, half-crushing her, and was gone.

Ten minutes later, in that first wan, treacherous paleness that is the false dawn, she could just see a gliding, silent smudge move out and evaporate over the smoky waters. It was the Fowleys' gunning-punt, put out, for the first time in its history, without the 'gurt gun,' and God knew what it was going to do.

It was bitterly cold out there on the glassy waters of the estuary—a glassiness which showed the presence of mud close beneath. Young Fowley blew on his hands as he stopped his rowing for a moment, and watched the mist wreathing across the face of the waters like smoke.

A subdued gabbling ahead betokened the presence of wild-fowl in numbers somewhere.

He rowed on in silence, with short, lapping

strokes, for miles. Then he stopped, and waited in greater silence, broken only occasionally by the quick whimper of wings overhead, or the lost-soul cry of a lonely curlew. The cold had become almost unbearable, but Young Fowley would not beat his hands. That would make a noise, the one thing he did not want. Judging by the sounds, wild-fowl of various kinds were all round him, but not one could he see.

As the dawn visibly paled through the mist at last, he lay down quietly and cautiously in his punt, and day, growing upon him, revealed a falling tide. Even where he had rowed but shortly before was bare wet mud now, and there was only not mud beneath his keel because he had fetched up in one of those channels or gullies which would soon become surging torrents racing madly out between high mud-banks—a dangerous place to wait in. Suppose his little craft turned broadside on, nothing in the wide world could save him, no help come to him over the treacherous flat miles of ooze that so shortly before had been under water.

Slowly his punt sank in the channel below the level of the mud-flats; in a few minutes it would be hidden from view as completely as if it were buried. And swiftly day strode on

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through the mists, revealing and hiding again, like ghosts, wild-duck and widgeon, curlew, red-shank, and teal, and flocks of spidery dunlin, wheeling, now dark like smoke, now light as silver.

Young Fowley knelt in his punt, and drew from his sack a carefully-wrapped-up something, which, being unrolled, revealed itself as a neat, glistening, snaky, deadly little American repeating .22-bore rifle. But this was not all. Oh no! Young Fowley was no fool. Even the tiny 'sniff,' which is all that the .22-bore smokeless-powder cartridge makes by way of report, might carry across those leagues of desert-like silence to quick ears some suspicion of something unusual. Wherefore this rifle carried, fixed to its muzzle, a small round cylinder—harmless to behold, one admits, but the key to young Fowley's plan, all the same. On the effectiveness of that little innocent-looking metal cylinder, Young Fowley, Kate, and indeed—though none knew it—half the village with them, stood or fell.

Anon, as the light grew, Young Fowley, having loaded his weapon, crouched flat in his punt, motionless, hidden, waiting. The sides of the channel now towered above him; the water gurgled and swished and snapped past his bows; the mud on either hand sucked and

sighed as shellfish of all kinds, and worm things, drew themselves into their holes to await the coming of the next tide.

Young Fowley lay like a log.

Came then voices along the top of the bank; a form, roughly blotched out in silhouette against the mist, showed at the top. A novice would have mistaken it for a crouched man, as it stood there a-magnified. But Young Fowley was no novice. He knew the tricks of the mist, which delights to distort all things.

In an instant the form had gone. It was clambering down to the water's edge. Young Fowley moved about as much as the average stone.

In a second another squabby shape appeared on the top of the mud. Young Fowley slid his rifle forward inch by stealthy inch over the beetle-backed bows of his punt. He aimed. He pulled the trigger. Followed a soft, scarcely audible hiss, then a peculiar sound that can only be put down as 'phtt,' and the form collapsed like a pricked air-balloon. There was nothing else.

Young Fowley jerked backward and forward the forearm of his rifle, and lay ready, re-loaded.

There was a dead silence down by the water.

One felt that the first form, now unseen, was standing alert, listening, waiting.

A third silhouette became visible on the top of the mud-bank. Again Young Fowley aimed—there could be no question of missing, the thing was so close. Again he pressed the trigger, and again there was, mysteriously enough, no loud report—only that little sighing hiss, that ominous ‘phtt,’ and that complete and instant subsiding of the third silhouette. But this time came a rush by the water’s edge, a beating of wings, an alarmed ‘Q-u-o-ck!’ and Young Fowley was alone. No more silhouettes appeared.

Young Fowley sat up with the quiet smile of one who beheld victory in sight, bound on his mud-pattens—or mud-shoes, if you like—and slopped incontinently overboard in the direction of the collapsed silhouettes. In two minutes he was back again with a couple of fine fat wild-duck hanging by the neck from his hand, each neatly killed by a single .22-bore ‘short’ bullet from his little rifle, and each saleable, he expected, at the rate of about one shilling and two or three pence, to the nearest game-dealer.

So far, however, his work had only begun. The water had now dropped low enough for him to ford across the channel, and in the

small gullies it would be still lower. He did not get into the punt again, but, anchoring her, crept away along the bottom of the channel close to the water.

The day had now come. It was quite light, and the mist was peeling off in torn rifts about him even as he moved; but the cold remained. As he crept along he was invisible except in the gully itself; his head did not show above the mud-bank; but he could not avoid the hollow 'slodge, slodge!' made by his pattens at each step. The wild-fowl, however, were used to this, heard it daily, emanating from the cocklers, the prawners, and the eel-spearers, and would not be alarmed.

Invisible himself, and unable to see, he knew pretty well what was around him, for every voice of the mud-haunters was known to him, and the meaning thereof.

Suddenly he stopped. The soft, plaintive whistling of that beautiful duck, the widgeon, came from close at hand. Cautiously he crept up the slippery bank of mud, and peered over. Then he 'froze.' Twenty-seven widgeon were feeding on the mud within sixty yards, the beautiful gray-blue backs of the male birds glinting in the newly risen sun.

Silent as a cat, he slipped half-a-dozen of the long-range cartridges — '22 'long rifle'

they call them—into his magazine, and, aiming, fired.

Twenty-seven little wild-duck peacefully asleep or feeding on the trailing fingers of *Zostera marina* grass! Then—chaos! Chaos, and twenty-six straining, whistling pairs of wings were climbing to the clouds. All they knew was that, without sound, or sign, or reason, one of their number had suddenly, with a little flapping, toppled over dead. There had come no sound—nothing—just the dead bird; but as they ‘flared’ aloft they saw the man-form move in the gully—they would not have seen him if he had not moved—and they partly understood.

Next instant they more than understood.

Young Fowley was firing at them, firing still, with that lightning quickness only possible with an American ‘pump action’ repeater, as they rose. They heard bullets, singing little high-pitched songs to themselves, come exploring up into the air all about. Then one of them ceased to hear, and collapsing in a puff of feathers as it flew, turned over and fell headlong, quite dead.

And below, Young Fowley’s quiet smile broadened. Good shooting or a ‘fluke,’ it mattered not. He was making a living for Old Fowley. He was winning back Kate.

Not that he was a fool, though. He knew the power of the gamekeeper's field-glasses, even if there had, most miraculously, been no report throughout—a fact which explains why, when he showed himself on the open mud, and worked by casual and devious routes to pick up his two prizes, the rifle was down his trouser-leg and a big basket for cockling was under his arm.

Young Fowley spent all that bitter, still, dark winter day 'gully crawling' up and down the estuary, rarely in sight by reason of the said gullies, but always within hearing of the gamekeepers along the shore, yet never a sound, or the breath of a sound, of his shooting did they hear, and never a hint of his game did they suspect. For why? Because, simply put, he had a Maxim silencer on the muzzle of the rifle, and that present-day little miracle pent up in a metal cylinder turns the report of rifles to—nothing at all, just nothing at all.

How many duck and curlew, plover and redshank and brent geese, Young Fowley killed does not matter. A few he hit flying, most he shot standing, and many he missed. God knows how he withstood the cold without food; but the inspiration, the fire that upheld him, must have been Kate—though she did

not know it, and was probably incapable of understanding it.

In that awful cold hour after dark had fallen, when the frost first begins to twist his terrible tourniquet on the forehead of Nature, Young Fowley came home. Kate was aware of his punt, a darker smudge out of the smudged dark, creeping in silently over the high tide.

He ran the little craft up to the rough landing-steps, worn hollow by the tread of generations of wild-fowlers stepping out of punts at all hours of the twenty-four; he made fast, and, in the darkness, he held out his hand.

Kate put out hers, wondering, and—jumped back with a muffled exclamation. She had not touched his fingers at all, but feathers!

He took her hand, and bending down, forced her to bend too, moving her hand about the bottom of the punt, and everywhere she felt cold, soft, but stiff feathery bodies.

He released her, and bent again in the darkness. Then, straightening, he handed her eight feathery corpses, eight of the best—two wild-duck, two widgeon, two plover, one curlew, and one brent goose. She took them, and being a true daughter of the marshmen, hid them about her clothes. She was dumb. At a fair estimate

he had given her food for her parents and herself and five shillings besides; for her father would know well enough where to sell the spoils—and, better still, how to keep his mouth shut.

To you this sum sounds nothing; but go and live in a cottage where the bed—with two thin blankets—has one leg going through a rotten floor, and stay there for a week or so, half-freezing and half-starving, with nothing in the wide world to do, and with the knowledge that you can only look forward to many such weeks to come, and then, and not till then, turn up your nose at five bob and roast wild-duck! Kate did not turn up her nose at all. Wealth, like happiness, is simply and solely a matter of comparison, and Kate felt wealthy that night; while, as for happiness, I suppose Young Fowley could be trusted to have seen to that.

Young Fowley took home about ten birds, and it is now known that at one or two cottages in the village where they were most wanted, a wild-duck, or a curlew, or a plover mysteriously appeared out of the darkness—nobody giving, or asking, a reason.

But that was not all. If it had been, Alf, the gamekeeper, might still have won the day. Young Fowley went 'fishing' and 'eel-spearing'

and 'cockling' every day after that, and returned, with stealth, every night after dark, to be met by Kate at the landing, and sometimes by Kate's father, who kept 'cave' while Kate, with a voluminous basket of 'washing,' saw to the removal of the spoils—as 'washing'—under two folded aprons and an old clean shirt.

Not every day, of course, did good luck pet Young Fowley; tides, for one thing, were not always right; but the heavy frost continued unyielding and merciless, taming the birds, and Young Fowley's daily bag never fell below five head of birds slain, and once numbered over thirty. Half the village was living and waiting on the success of his little American repeater with the silencer; Old Fowley plumped out visibly, and puffed fiercely at real 'bacoy' in his pipe, after real good hot soup meals. Alf, the gamekeeper, received his *congé* in that unmistakable, though scarcely polite or gentle, fashion which the daughters of the marsh affect—the man who ignores the same is not unlikely to get knifed 'by accident,' by the way; and Young Fowley got a bit put by against 'rough weather,' so to speak, into the bargain.

Then the blue let fall its bolt—two bolts—and that little world was turned upside-down.

Young Fowley had gone forth over the sheeted face of the waters before dawn, as

usual, upon a day—upon, to be exact, his twenty-first birthday, though they don't take much notice of birthdays, twenty-first or any other, in the marsh folks' society. A day is just a day with them, and, like any other, a question of daily bread. Wherefore Young Fowley hied him forth, as usual, to poach—at least, so it would be called by law, though the marshmen looked upon wild-fowling as their ancient and peculiar right, which many clear-headed people may think it undoubtedly was.

The sky, which had been getting lower and lower and blacker; the frost, which had become more and more iron-like and implacable; and the deathly black, starved stillness, which had been getting more and more portentous for over a week, all seemed to have come to a 'head,' so to speak, that day. One felt, in fact, that the air was full of a great foreboding, and that momentous happenings were at hand. Even the very birds seemed to feel the dread spell, for they were as silent as the rest of the world under the black scowl of the impending sky. Without a doubt, the Gods of the North were out on the warpath.

Young Fowley shot in grim, stealthy silence all through the short, bitter day; and the sky grew blacker and blacker above him; and the

air grew colder, and stiller, and more still ; and he thanked his brains that he had got a silver 'bead' on his front sight, which he could never have seen otherwise, and a silencer, without which, in that awful absence of sound, even the little spit of the '22-bore cartridge would have sounded clearly across the wet waste, and given him away.

The tide had risen towards night, turning all the estuary into a shallow sea, and was beginning to turn again. Young Fowley, lying flat, had just taken one last shot at a swimming flock of teal, barely discernible in the twilight, when from close behind, without warning, before he could move, a harsh voice cried triumphantly out of the gathering gloom, 'Got yer !'

Young Fowley caught his breath. Young Fowley slid down his rifle out of sight, and spun about in the boat where he lay, to find himself looking straight into the grinning, square, wooden, brutal face of—Alf.

How long that young man had lain there in his punt, creeping up stealthily astern of him ; how he managed to get so close—within twenty yards—without being heard ; or what exactly he had seen or guessed, Young Fowley did not know. One thing alone was certain—he had seen enough to get Young Fowley arrested for

poaching, to have his rifle confiscated, to 'stop his game,' to return Old Fowley to semi-starvation, and to lose him Kate.

As punt drifted parallel with punt, Young Fowley glared at Alf across the narrow intervening space of cold, leaden water, as a cornered beast glares at its hunter. Swiftly his eyes measured the distance and ran all over his man, met the eyes of his rival, and riveted there for an instant. Then, still glaring thus, with teeth set and lips tight drawn in almost a snarl, his right hand, holding the little paddle which he used to 'work' his punt up to wild-fowl, slid negligently overside. Next instant, stealthily, without apparently a movement on his part, without taking his eyes from Alf's face, shining white through the gloom, he began slowly to edge his punt, inch by deadly inch, nearer to that of his enemy. God knows what he had in his mind.

'Got yer!' sang out Alf triumphantly. 'Got yer fair on th' 'op! It's the jail fer ye, Young Fowley, this toime, Oi'm a-thinkin'.' And then suddenly, suspicion, or foreboding, or fear—the fear of the bully, who knows he has driven a man too far—leaping to his eyes, 'No, yer don't, though!' he yelled, his voice changing, as he dug his oars into the tide and pulled three quick strokes away from Young

Fowley's punt. 'Oi've seen 'nough fer *our* purpose. *We* keepers an' th' police ken come an' take yer all nice an' proper wid 'andcuffs after Oi've a-gone and laid infermation. Yer don't murder us this tide, Young Fowley.'

From first to last Young Fowley had not said a word, but even as the other edged away, still speaking, a sound came into his ears, a strange, dread, mysterious whisper away to the north-east, and his lips slowly set into a grim smile.

'All right,' he said, straightening up and seizing his oars on the instant. 'Ave it yer own way, Alf.' Ere's off. Better look out 'ow yer gets t' shore. Ut's a-comin'.'

'What's a-comin'?'

'Th' blizzard.' And then, with a shout that fairly made Alf jump, '*Run* fer ut.'

Alf turned and listened, and in the silence that followed could be distinctly heard, away to the north-east, a steady, growing, soughing hiss. He looked round, and although it was not yet time for dark, the gloom had suddenly deepened almost into night while the two men had been intent upon each other; a puff of icy wind caught him on the cheek, and a little wave went slap—just like the slap of a tiny hand it was—on the side of the bows of his punt. Then, without a word, he bent to his

oars, and swinging his punt about, began to row like a madman towards that nearer part of the shore where the squire's estate lay and the keepers lived.

Young Fowley had already got his mast up, and a yard or so of 'lug' sail followed as his punt swung round, and he, settling in the stern, began to row too like a man demented, on his longer journey, down-estuary to the village, one eye on the blackening water behind, one over his shoulder at the worrying sail. 'Better mind t' mud,' he roared; 'tide's a-fallin' fast.' Then he was gone.

Young Fowley went very quickly indeed, because he couldn't help himself. The second puff of wind was more decisive than the first, and nearly capsized him. Wherefore he took in sail, and set his teeth to meet the third; but the third took his sail right away, with a report like a pistol-shot, and it really began to blow, and Young Fowley to row. His course, luckily, lay nearly S.S.W., and the wind coming from behind caught him in the broad of the back and nearly lifted him out of the punt, and almost cut him in two at the same time. That wind had touched pack-ice. Then it really began to blow once more, and for good.

Young Fowley whipped out of his pocket a flask of brandy which he had kept on him

a whole week against eventualities, and drank half of it neat. Then he crammed on his cap, seized his oars, and—fought.

The hissing behind suddenly leapt up an octave, and became a steady, seething moan.

Young Fowley saw the dirty, purfled sheets of water between the lurking, slowly rising mud-banks crisp over and freckle with foam; he looked over his shoulder, and beheld the whole of the northern half of the world blotted out in an immense, hurrying white wall that hung from leaden heaven to leaden water, and in an instant, with a rush and a hurl, it was upon him, and he was tossing and wrenching in a whirling, howling chaos of rushing white.

Now, in order fully to understand the position, you must know that fowling-punts in those parts are flat-bottomed, shallow-water, calm-weather craft, that can float where a plover can wade almost, and are in no sense deep-water, rough-weather boats. Very little, either of wind or wave, overturns them, even in the most skilful hands. Moreover, with the tide rushing off the mud like water out of a bath, there is a very particular risk, if you cannot see, or do not know most precisely, where you are going and what is beneath you at that spot, of getting the punt tilted up on the sheer edge of

one of the gully-banks of mud, when she will capsize and leave you to drown, or hang on as long as you please, according as fate, or your strength, takes you. Hence there was anxiety in the village in certain quarters when the blizzard smote the place before Young Fowley came home. Nobody except the head-keeper, and another who had seen him go—and they told the coastguard—felt anxiety about Alf.

Less than an hour later, as Old Fowley and Kate's old father, strong, alert, square men, encased to the eyes in sea-boots, oilskins, and sou'-westers, stood in the shelter of an old gravel-barge pulled up for the winter on the village beach of the estuary, and let the howling blizzard go hurling by in white curtains, Kate's bare arm and pointing finger flashed out from between them, and the cape she had flung over her head flapped in the old men's eyes.

'Thar she be!' shouted Kate, harshly as a crow, and was gone, leaping down over the green-slimed chalk-boulders, her hair streaming into the gale, her cape and her not over-clean white apron fluttering like a flag.

The old men stumbled after her, heavy, but stubborn. Their eyes, trained and puckered at the corners by a life spent in peering into the distances, swept out over the water, and——

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‘Thar she be, sure!’ they roared in chorus.

At the end of a rough sort of landing-stage groin, part sandspit, part driven piles, used by the marshmen to shelter their craft behind and to land at, seen and gone again in the howling inferno over the water, they had caught one fleeting glimpse, a smudge merely, a ghostly something, of what they knew was a craft tearing by.

There was no need to ask where to go. Had not Kate already led the way? They could see her now, a very witch of the blizzard, all streaming hair and flapping clothes, racing with the spray-clouds along the water’s edge. Such folk know exactly what another will do. Indeed, it was obvious, for to turn and come in broadside-on in the teeth of the storm would be death. Young Fowley, if it was he—and Kate seemed miraculously to *know* that it was—would crowd as close as he dared to the end of the ‘hard,’ as they called the staked sandspit, and run straight on, obliquely in under the little shelter it afforded, striking the shore, still obliquely, farther down. And this he did.

Wherefore the two old men arrived just in time for Old Fowley to catch the dead weight of Young Fowley as he staggered up out of the surf and collapsed, blue-faced and silent, into Kate’s arms, whilst Kate’s father, seizing the

punt, almost lifted it bodily ashore ere it could be transformed to matchwood. He stooped and brushed the snow away from the narrow 'well' of the punt, and, with his gloved hands, lifted out one by one the bodies of many wild-fowl, frozen stiff. As he did so, he jerked his head sideways and laughed into his beard; and Kate, glancing over her shoulder, saw and laughed too. But they have a strange notion of humour, these rough marsh folk.

Three hours later Young Fowley, almost recovered—such is the hardness of these sons of the estuary—sat before a blazing wood-fire in the old cottage; Old Fowley sat opposite, erect, square, stiff, grim, and unmoved as ever, pipe in mouth; Kate swung a sea-booted leg on the table; and her father filled his 'clay' from Old Fowley's tin.

Young Fowley had the remains of a meal beside him, and a hot drink; but there was something wrong somewhere. He had not spoken a word, and his face was terrible. All waited according to their temperament. Suddenly he spoke, looking up hard at Kate. 'Ye'd better go, lass,' he snapped shortly. 'I've done ut, an' am no further use to ye!'

'Done what?' queried Kate, still swinging

her leg under her soiled white apron, but making no effort to move.

'Got kopped—fair kopped; watched at th' game an' identified. P'lice 'ull be 'ere d'rectly.'

Kate threw back her tangled head, the light of the one hanging lamp falling full on her brown, oddly square face, with the strange oblique eyes, and she laughed. The two older men watched her in silence. Young Fowley scowled at the fire. Then, as if a pregnant thought had struck her, she bent forward, and asked, in that thick, soft, yet harsh voice which seems characteristic of these marshland girls, 'Who kopped yer?'

'Alf; an' 'e'll lay information quick as knife,' Young Fowley replied.

There was a quick gasp, a treble start, and all three listeners stared at each other, and then slowly back at Young Fowley.

'Did yer fight?' Kate was speaking now in quick, tense whispers.

'No.'

'Ave words loike?'

'No; no time. We see'd t' storm a-comin', an' 'e made fer shore over 'gainst t' squire's, an' I made for 'ome.'

'That th' last ye see'd on 'im?'

'Yes; an' 'e'll 'ave th' p'lice 'ere quick, I tell ye. Better go, lass. Go.'

‘E won’t, though.’

It was Old Fowley who had spoken, to the accompaniment of his iron fist banged on the table.

Young Fowley looked up sharply. Something in the old man’s voice caught his ear.

Kate laughed derisively and loud.

Her father chuckled.

‘Cause why?’

‘Cause ’e’s dead.’

‘Dead?’ Young Fowley half rose.

‘Dead as a log,’ continued the old man. ‘Noos only come in ’alf-hour ago. Found by coastguard an’ squire’s men a-’angin’ crooked an’ frozen stiff as a board to ’is punt, an’ she was a-floatin’ bottom up.’

‘Merciful ’eavens above!’ Young Fowley put his hand slowly to his head. ‘An’ what’——

‘Wait,’ cried Old Fowley, putting his hand inside his jersey and pulling out a long sealed envelope, which he handed to Young Fowley. ‘This be yer twenty-first birthday, ain’t ut?’

‘Yes; but’——

‘Then read that,’ went on the old man peremptorily, handing him the envelope.

And Young Fowley broke the thing open and read, the others watching him do it.

‘MY DEAR SON,—If you have survived to the age which will entitle you to read this letter under the tuition and management of that dogged and straightforward old wild-fowler whom you have been taught to consider as your father, you will have gained sufficient common-sense and knowledge of the right way for a man to live to enable you to read this letter with a calm and open judgment, and to handle those small possessions which, being my own private property, I have the right to will that you shall inherit—namely, my oyster-beds, standing, as you know, on the shore of the estuary. Even paying a foreman to manage these, they have yielded me rather over £200 a year; but you, of course, will be by now fully qualified to manage them yourself. It is my wish, however, that in the working of these you will continue to employ only people of the neighbourhood who are true marshland stock—that is, my tenants, and not any outsiders. There are, I know, but few of this old wild-fowling stock left, but my forefathers have always held themselves more or less responsible for their welfare, and I would have it so after my death. I would point out to you that with the oyster-beds go certain rights as to the shore and water appertaining, which I have, as it were, bought from my estate, which rights

will allow you to permit the people to shoot or fish on shore or estuary, as they have always, though really illegally, done. I need hardly remind you, my dear son, that I never married, and that you cannot inherit my estates; but your mother was of true marshland stock. I have seen to it that your foster-father has been suitably and properly recompensed for his task of rearing and training you in a manner that would fit you to enjoy with discretion the small property I had to leave you.—Your affectionate Father'——

Young Fowley put down the letter with a gasp; and well he might, for it was signed by the late squire of the parish, and underneath was a postscript referring him to the late squire's family solicitors, who had been fully instructed in the matter.

And that, I think, is about all; or, rather, it is only the middle, but the rest of the story is so obviously the private concern of Young Fowley and of Kate—who is now his wife—that there is no need to set it down here.

THE WHITE ELEPHANT.

THERE is one thing harder than buying a great diamond, and that is to steal it; and, provided it be big enough, there is one thing still harder than stealing a great diamond, and that is to know what to do with it when you have got it. Once stolen, it is a marked stone until it is cut, and nobody will buy it from you, not even a 'fence,' even at a 'cut-throat' price. And to be cut it must go out of the country; and to get it out of the country, as many have found to their cost, is a most unhealthy speculation—practically an impossibility.

Now, Andrew Catherington was a man who knew what to do with great diamonds when other people had stolen them. It was his profession—nay, his art—but not his trade, for by trade he was an oyster-merchant.

Frederick Golder Green, the black-and-white artist, took The Wilderness because it was near Harbournmouth, the great seaport, was on the main road, and near 'a bit of life.' You know what 'a bit of life' means. We all know. Just so. Golder Green's wife was

a stout lady, who swore she would pine to death anywhere where she could not see 'a bit of life,' and she forced Golder Green to take The Wilderness, which was a miserable, damp rabbit-warren, because of the necessity for this same 'bit of life.' Golder Green had four young children, and—well, he had to give way. All good fathers who have young children will understand what I mean. But Golder Green, being, for all his fine illustrating, rather a poor personality, took no pains to hide his loathing of The Wilderness, all the same; for Golder Green hated 'a bit of life.' He rather hated life in any form, I fancy—even his own; but his enemies said that he had led a wild youth, and seen all the life he wanted to then. Golder Green said nothing. He 'grouched' under his breath.

Now see how strange is Fate! Andrew Catherington was worth a good deal, by any standard, and no man, or woman either—not even his wife—knew what Golder Green was worth; but I can tell *you*, in private, that he had, in the dining-room of The Wilderness, when all were in bed and he was supposed to be finishing some illustrations, taken a furtive peep at his pass-book, and found that he was worth just seventy-one pounds and tenpence.

Golder Green swore. I may not tell you

what he said, but he swore in French, as being more vivid.

Now it happened that Golder Green was at that time doing the illustrations for a series of burglary and jewel-robbery stories in a certain magazine, and he was, therefore, interested in anything in real life dealing with such matters. Wherefore he kept his eye upon the papers, and what he saw in the paper that night when he peeped at his pass-book, and wondered how the hell he was going to pull through the next three months, was an account of the robbery of the great 'White Elephant,' the king diamond of the East (not the east), weight 197 carats, and worth untold, and the announcement that one thousand pounds was offered as reward to any person who could give information that would lead to the recovery of the 'White Elephant.'

'Gad!' grunted Golder Green, leaning back in his chair and staring at the warm light of the inverted incandescent. 'If only I could spy on these chaps who have stolen this "White Elephant," what ripping illustrations they would make!'

Even as he spoke, a tiny, tiny, amber-coloured money-spider let itself down from the ceiling, straight down on an invisible thread, past his nose, within an inch of his staring eye,

and stepped off the thread coolly and calmly into the palm of his hand.

And even as the money-spider landed, Golder Green's extraordinarily quick ears heard the tread of a man going past the wall of the house outside, close to his ear as he sat. There was a gravel-path between the wall of the house and the stable—the latter a damp, evil-smelling dungeon, liable to flood, as was the adjoining coach-house, in times of heavy rain. But that was nothing, The Wilderness having been the abode of smugglers, and, so men said, possessing a subterranean passage to the sea. It really did possess a most horrible, slug-ridden cellar, and a gloomy, dirty wilderness of a garden. Still, no man had any right to be walking close past the other side of the wall of the house at that hour—1.30 A.M., to wit—since the stable, garden, and other doors were all shut, and the garden was surrounded by a wall topped with broken glass.

Golder Green got up from his arm-chair with his peculiar, dry, tight-lipped smile, and exchanged his pencil for a Remington .22-calibre repeating-rifle. (It was safer than a revolver, because much less noisy and less likely to kill.) But it was characteristic of the man that he did not go directly towards the sound of the footsteps—stealthy footsteps

they were—but slipped noiselessly out of the front-door, and crept up to the two big shut doors of the coach-house from the front. Any one walking where he had heard the footsteps must, he knew, be going to the stable, out of which the coach-house led; though why he should go the mysterious night-walker alone knew, since there was nothing in either place to attract any man, Golder Green keeping neither car nor horse.

Grass grew dank outside the coach-house, so that Golder Green, in the rubber Wellingtons he had slipped on—it was a vile, wet, and cold night—was able to approach the place quite noiselessly, and peer through the big keyhole, which had no key.

What he saw was a subdued light flashing, and black forms of men in silhouette bending over a grating in the floor of the coach-house; at least, he judged by the metallic sound that that was what they were doing. God knew who the men were.

But what Golder Green *heard* jerked him as rigid and as still as ever he had been in all his life, or would be this side the grave, though his heart was beating in his throat, and he felt that his whole body shook so that they, the terrible they, whoever they were, must hear him.

‘Give us that damned diamond,’ muttered a bass voice, ‘and let us sink her till th’ ’ue an’ cry’s blown over! Look alive.’

Golder Green heard that, and Golder Green remained ‘frozen’ in his tracks where he stood, too utterly stupefied to stir till the clinking of metal warned him that the grating was being put back in its place, and the men were about to make a move.

Then he returned to the house on tiptoe by the way he had come, closed and bolted the front-door, and sought his chair and a cigarette. He added a strong glass of hot water and a slice of lemon to the cigarette—and, oh yes, just a drop of whisky to the water—and he thought. Cigarette followed cigarette, and one glass followed another, until when, at an ungodly hour, Golder Green crept to bed, he—well, he knew he would sleep; but, above and beyond that, he had thought out a plan, and his mind was made up.

It was a plan characteristic of Golder Green, if people had but known it, and if he had not been that most miserable of beings, a prophet entirely without honour in his own country.

Next morning he caught the 8.10 to London. It meant getting up at six, and he hated early rising—except to go wild-fowl shooting, his only recreation—with the bored hatred of an

artistic temperament; but he hated poverty worse. Arrived in London, he at once called upon Stirland Botly, *the* private detective.

Botly, a round man with the face of a Roman Catholic priest, knowing his name from the magazines, received him with grudging matter-of-factness; but before he had finished his story Stirland Botly put all his fingertips together, and nearly abolished with one look a clerk who would interrupt him.

‘I see no one—yet,’ he snapped, and, as the door shut, turned to Golder Green as if he were going to spring on him. ‘But how d’you know it’s the “White Elephant”?’ he flashed.

‘I—I spent half-an-hour this morning grubbing in the coach-house drain for the damned thing, and fetched it up wrapped in oil-silk in a heavy metal box. I looked and saw. There can be only one stolen diamond *that* size.’

Stirland Botly threw up his hands and sat back with a gesture of despair.

‘What’s up now?’ Golder Green’s voice was harsh and hard as he spoke.

‘Oh, nothing. You’ve done it, that’s all. You’ll be a dead man before midnight most likely, or a half-dead one,’ replied Botly. ‘Men who can steal the “White Elephant”

won't lose her'—it was curious how often the stone was referred to in the feminine—'over the little matter of a mere life or two. However, it won't be the first, nor yet, I expect, the last, human life she has cost.' He lit a cigarette with evidently waning interest, disregarding the look of hopeless misery on Golder Green's face. 'By the way, what did you do with the thing? Put it in your safe, I suppose, where you are not likely to find it, or sent it back to the owner with a request for the reward?'

'Neither. I put it back very carefully where I found it. I guessed you'd want to catch the thieves, just as I want to catch the reward. They might have said *I* stole it, else. Where was I wrong?'

'Gracious goodness! A flash of genius! I never expected it. You weren't wrong, but it was the act of one man in ten thousand.' Stirland Botly rang his bell, swung himself on to his feet and into his coat and hat—all in one motion, like the movements of a machine. 'Come on,' he jerked. 'We can discuss the rest as we go along.'

'Where the devil to?' Golder Green dived for his coat and hat, and hurried after him.

'Your home.' The detective never paused as he went, with slow, ordered haste, through

the outer office, and, tossing the head clerk Golder Green's card, ordered, 'Address on that gentleman's card finds me, but'—he wagged a weighty finger—'be *very, very* careful.'

Suddenly, as they sat in the train, journeying down to Travant, where Golder Green lived, the detective turned upon the artist, and said sharply, after a long pause, 'All you care about is getting the money!'

'The reward? Yes. And all you care about is getting the credit,' came the prompt answer, somewhat unexpectedly, and equally sharply.

Stirland Botly eyed his companion with considerably more care than he had done before ere he replied. That sharp answer made him begin to realise that Golder Green, for all his thin, worn weakness, might under the surface be a 'bigger' man than people guessed. 'But why? You've made a name, haven't you?' he queried at last.

'Yes; but a name, unlike a face, may not be a fortune. And I've got four children, you know, and—a wife. I don't want my children to remember me as I remember my father. He never did anything for me, and cared less.'

'Ah!' An odd, tender expression came into the great private detective's clean-shaven coun-

tenance, if you can imagine tenderness on such a face. 'How strangely are we made! You want the thousand pounds, and I'll see that you get it. And I, with no children and no wife, want the man who's got that diamond. I've been after him for years, and never before been so close. I don't know who or what he is, but he exists. There's only one man in Britain who could buy a stone like the "White Elephant" from those that stole it, and be confident of getting it away to be recut. And it isn't the first. He deals in stolen great gems; is an artist at the job. There was the "Eagle's Eye," but that was only 37 carats; and the "Sirius," 41 carats; and the "Luck of Tigris," 51 carats; and others. All were bought from the men that stole 'em by the same man, and he got 'em all away. But this is his biggest venture, his crowning triumph, and I've a sort of suspicion it's going to be his last. If he gets the "White Elephant" away he'll stop, and I shall never get another chance of catching him, shall never get *my* crowning triumph. And I've never been so close to him before, and probably never shall be again. It's Fate, and you're Fate's tool!'

'Thanks.' Golder Green looked out wearily at the racing green-and-chocolate fields and at the shaven hedges. He seemed suddenly very

worn and tired. 'But I hope I get my thou' for the kiddies' sake. How shall I reconcile you with the wife? Be jolly with her. She likes "life." Keep joking, and she won't suspect. She doesn't know.'

'Not about your wanting the money for the children or being hard up?'

'No.'

'Does she care?'

'I don't know,' resignedly.

'Ah! But don't worry. I'll act the jovial, fat friend; and, if you don't mind, I'm afraid I shall have to be your guest—a paying one, old chap, please—until this fellow turns up to reclaim his "White Elephant." Agreed?'

'Agreed,' assented Golder Green with one of his tired sighs, and went to sleep.

Before the light failed Stirland Botly had examined the hiding-place of the 'White Elephant,' and had held the great flashing jewel in his hand. It had a hypnotic effect, somehow, as if it would force one to steal it and run away, and Stirland Botly put it back into its hiding-place in a hurry.

'Ough!' he shuddered. 'Bad as a snake! And it is written in the annals of the Eastern Court from whence it was originally stolen that whosoever faileth to return the "White Elephant" to its rightful resting-place among

the treasures of the Eastern king and the priests to whom it belongs shall die, or meet with other disaster. Now, the "White Elephant" has, to my knowledge, been stolen four times, and five deaths have occurred, directly or indirectly, through it. I don't envy this prince of diamond "fences" who placed it here, but it's like him to hide his loot on another's property !'

The diamond was in a heavy cash-box in a drain under the stable. The drain was partly full of stinking running water, and a grating could be, and was, let down across it, to prevent any possibility of the cash-box being washed away. As a hiding-place it was not half bad, and many a man has thought of worse.

'We must fix a "lie-up" in the loft above,' said the detective.

That night was the first of many intensely trying and cold vigils held by Golder Green and Stirland Botly, wrapped up in rugs on the floor of the loft above the coach-house. The place, as I have said, was old, very old—too old—and there were plenty of holes in the floor of the loft through which to peer and to aim an automatic pistol or other weapon ; also, there had to be complete darkness. But although the thief, or, rather, the master of thieves, came not, those two watchers

were not alone. There were others there to entertain them—an unholy company of decay and the night. There were, for instance, the rats—pairs of gimlet-holes of cruel green light in the pit-like blackness—who soon found out that the two humans feared light and noise as much as they did, and accordingly took unheard-of liberties, even unto the nibbling of Golder Green's hair. There was, too, a newt—vernacular 'effet'—cold and horrible—which somehow—Heaven knows what it was doing there—managed to get, half-dead with cold, quite far enough down Stirland Botly's neck. There were spiders, disturbed in their sleep, and anxious for warmth—any warmth, rugs for choice. There were earwigs—very many earwigs—also with strong tastes in the same line, and a centipede that bit. But the worst companion of all was the smell—mixed mildew, decay, damp, and drain—and, as Stirland Botly explained, almost with sobs, 'If we smoke we shall stampede the whole outfit,' and Golder Green, sucking a formalin throat tablet, mournfully agreed. But it was all very lugubrious, and the language used was not of the best.

Days—or nights, rather—slipped into a week, and a week into weeks, and weeks into a month, and still the great man, the prince of all the

'fences,' did not turn up to claim the 'White Elephant.' The hue and cry that was raised after the big theft began to blow over; something else had happened, somebody died or did something, and the eyes of the public began to turn to other things. Fresh crimes were committed, and Scotland Yard had, partially at any rate—although Scotland Yard, men say, never really forgets—forgotten the 'White Elephant,' and found other things to concentrate upon.

'By the way,' asked Stirland Botly one day, 'anything unpleasant happened to you since the "White Elephant" came to lodge on your premises?'

Golder Green pulled his moustache, and swore suddenly. 'Why, yes,' he exclaimed. 'My drawings have been found fault with, and returned more frequently than ever before; one of my children has been taken ill; the sanitary inspector threatens things over rubbish collecting in the garden; and—er—well—er—I've fallen out with the wife—er—worse than—oh, hang it all, rather badly, shall we say?'

'Just so. The spell is already at work. Well, the quicker this beggar comes for his precious gem the better I shall be pleased. It's like housing a lost devil.'

During these weary days of waiting Golder Green and Stirland Botly would nod and drop off to sleep in their chairs if nobody happened to be speaking, when they both became oddly absent-minded, and their manners were strained and abrupt, and you could see their trouble in their eyes.

Of course, they explored a good deal when they were not sleeping—round the garden, for instance, which was large and full of old fruit-trees, and surrounded by a high wall, guarded as to its top with broken glass. That is to say, there was broken glass except in one place. Some alterations had had to be made to some drains or something—before Golder Green's time, that was—and the result was an unsightly mound of sticky clay thrown up against the wall in one corner and reaching nearly to the top of it—Golder Green had often growled at that mound—and at that spot, on the top of that part of the wall that was above the clay mound, the broken glass had been chipped away, and for the space of about a yard or two the top of the wall was flat and harmless. Ordinary people, of course, would scarcely have noticed it. Golder Green and Stirland Botly did. It afforded the only means of getting into the garden when all was locked up for the night.

‘By that road,’ quoth Stirland Botly, ‘will come our friend.’

‘Then I wish to God he’d come quickly! This strain will give me neurasthenia,’ was Golder Green’s reply, and he meant it. ‘Shall we ever sleep in a bed again?’

‘Heaven knows, but—we’ve got the “White Elephant.” Always remember that. We’ve got the “White Elephant.”’

‘And,’ snapped Golder Green, ‘it’s got us. Curse the “White Elephant”!’

‘Yes, curse it!’ the detective agreed with deep fervour.

And well they might, for, I give you my word, the ‘White Elephant’ was no jovial guest. It was considerably adding to the strain by getting in on some of its fine work, it seemed. Mrs Golder Green had become indisposed, for one thing; another child was ill (chicken-pox); a servant had cut herself badly; another had left suddenly—not empty-handed; Mrs Golder Green’s dog had been poisoned—but I always think Golder Green and the detective knew most about that; a heart-breaking list of illustrations had proved failures; a slate had slid off the roof and nearly unroofed Golder Green; the household could not sleep properly, except at the wrong time; no one relished his meals, though the skeleton

of a rat discovered later in the boiler may have had something to do with *that*. Finally, the cat vanished one night from inside a locked-up house, and—Golder Green and Stirland Botly looked at one another.

Whatever may be said about the dog, they certainly were frankly nonplussed over the cat, especially when it reappeared two nights later, though the house was locked up as before.

And then it was that Stirland Botly gave voice to a suspicion that had been dawning upon him for some time. 'Look here, old man,' said he; 'it's my opinion that we're being watched, spied upon, and that that darn rogue knows we're lying in wait for him, and won't turn up.'

Golder Green nodded. 'Whom d'you suspect?' he queried moodily.

'Nobody. That's the worst of it. Not the servants; one's new, and they sleep together. God knows who it is! We'll make out we go to bed this night, and watch from a window Heaven grant we don't miss him in the dark!'

'Amen,' finished Golder Green, and they removed their rugs from that unspeakable loft with some ostentation.

That night they sat up in a little bedroom overlooking the narrow passage between the house and the stable which led to the stable

door. Any one coming from the garden to the stable and the coach-house must walk down the passage directly beneath their window. The trespasser could not come up the passage from the street, because the door at the end was bolted. Outside that door, and on one side of it, the coach-house doors opened out within a few yards of the street.

It was just past midnight, and Golder Green was preparing to take the first watch while Stirland Botly lay down on the bed and got some sleep. The house outside the open bedroom door was silent, in complete darkness, and asleep. Golder Green had just moved to the window, Botly to the bed, when the detective crossed over to Golder Green and whispered in his ear, 'The cat's gone!'

It was true. The ceaseless, rather annoying, purr of the cat, which had been with them in the still, dark room, had ceased. The cat had gone suddenly.

Then, silently again, and still on tiptoe, Stirland Botly crept out on to the landing. He remained for a minute peering over the banisters, listening, whilst Golder Green kept just where the other had left him, by the window. Then Stirland Botly tiptoed back. 'The cat's purring in the hall,' he whispered. 'What if there's some one else in the hall?'

'Gad!' whispered back Golder Green, who could think of nothing better to say, and for some time the two men remained side by side, listening with all their four ears; but never another sound could they hear, or catch a glimpse of anything in the darkness.

'Confound it!' Stirland Botly whispered at last. 'I'm going to search the house. You keep here and watch the passage.'

'You'll be killed,' predicted Golder Green; but he drew only a subdued laugh.

In a short time Stirland Botly was back again. Golder Green could not see the look upon his face, but he could almost feel it. Stirland Botly was breathing a little hard.

'What's up?' the artist whispered quickly.

'The cat!' was the reply.

'What of it?'

'Gone!'

'Gone! Where? Probably under a chair or something.'

'No. I've searched every nook with my electric torch. Besides, there aren't any chairs, or anything else, in the cellar.'

'In the cellar?'

'Yes. I followed it there, and it vanished there. The cellar door was open. Horrible damp, musty smell.'

'Open? But we left it shut!'

'I know we did. Nevertheless, it was open, and the cat went in there, and never came out, and wasn't there when I went in.'

'Holy smoke!' Golder Green laid his hand quickly upon the detective's arm. 'Remember what I told you about the tradition among the older natives as to a passage under this house?' he asked quickly.

'Yes—to the shore.'

'Yes, to the shore. And—'sh!'

Golder Green's quick ears had caught the faintest, most cautious tread of boots upon gravel. They came on. They passed beneath, and the two men, peering down, saw a dim form, darker than the surrounding dark, going down the passage before mentioned to the stable. They only waited to see that, then slipped out of the front-door and round to the coach-house doors.

A light was burning inside, an electric light—they could see it plainly through cracks and through the spaces between the door and its framework—and the clank of a grating being removed caught their ears. Followed a pause, a splash, the dripping of water, the sound of the cash-box hitting something, the clank of the grating again, and the light went out as footsteps moved to the stable.

Stirland Botly, automatic pistol in hand,

was peering through the side-door at the end of the passage as the form of a man came out of the stable, turned, and stole away up the garden path. The detective, silent as the shadows which he hugged, stole after him. Behind, '22 rifle in hand, Golder Green picked a cautious way.

Straight to the mound, as they expected, the man led them, then up the mound, and over the wall, but not, as they expected, into the field beyond. It was possible also to get into the garden of the cottage next door from here, and this the man did.

'Who lives in the cottage next door?' whispered Stirland Botly.

'Andrew Catherington, an oyster-merchant,' was the reply. 'But surely'——

'There's no "surely" in our game, my friend. The more unlikely, the more likely. Is that man he?'

'Looks uncommonly like his cut,' Golder Green admitted.

And Stirland Botly laughed a silent laugh. 'Then I'm not surprised. It's a clever "blind"——just what one might expect of such a master.'

However, the smudged form of the master they were watching ahead did not go to the cottage. He turned off and entered a big, long, low shed in the cottage garden.

‘Where he stores his oysters,’ whispered Golder Green, as the two, bent nearly double, followed him, dodging in and out among the apple-trees and the raspberry-canes.

A light had appeared inside the shed, showing through the chinks, and it quickly afforded the two a view of the interior.

They beheld a square, dark man of perhaps fifty, dressed in the inevitable blue jersey, jacket, trousers—nearly green—and peaked cap of the fishing fraternity. It was, however, his face that struck one, for it might have been a face cut from a cameo—long, sallow, clean-cut and shaven, and high-browed, with eyes that flashed the sheathed glance of a bird—a bird of prey. There was nothing coarse or common about that face, or about those hands that were now taking down a box of oysters from the tiers of flat oyster-boxes arranged upon shelves all along the length of the interior.

Now, it was perhaps characteristic of Stirland Botly, and a secret of his success, that, quite as a matter of course, he noted it was the third box in the third tier that the man—‘undoubtedly Andrew Catherington,’ Golder Green now whispered—had selected, and that, as he opened the box and picked out an oyster, it was the third oyster in the third row.

Holding the shell up to the light, Catherington pressed the back, and the shell opened wide upon the touch. The watchers could see, in the glare of the lamp, that it was quite empty, and hollowed out.

Then from the cash-box which he had placed upon the bench Catherington removed and unwrapped the 'White Elephant'—it shone in the yellow light like the evil eye of some pagan god—placed it in the oyster, shut down the shell with a soft click which told of a catch somewhere hidden within, placed the shell back in its proper place upon the shelf, and turned to go.

And as he did so he caught and jagged his finger upon a rusty nail; so that the last they saw of him, as he passed from shed to cottage, was of a square, indistinct figure, with an extinguished lamp, sucking an injured finger.

'And that,' whispered Golder Green, straightening up with some relief at last, 'is what comes of meddling with the "White Elephant." She's already got in on her fine work with him.' Then he swung upon Stirland Botly. 'There's the diamond! There's the man! How are we—*well?*'

'Right-o!' came the instant reply. 'You wait here, and guard that jewel with your life.'

I'll pop back to your house and ring up the police. I've everything arranged.'

And Golder Green waited. Not that he liked waiting, but he liked going and losing touch with that confounded gem still less. He had a feeling that he was being watched, as if he could see the baleful, flashing eye of the 'White Elephant' peering at him through wood of box and very shell. A devilish temptation to steal it seized him, and he broke into a cold sweat of fear that he should give way. Its spell seemed still upon him, and every twisted apple-stem became crouched cronies of Catherington, creeping up to pounce upon him. Once he would have fired, but discovered in time that he had dug the muzzle of his rifle into the mould in the suppressed excitement, and the rifle-barrel was, therefore, solidly plugged with earth. Then he took to wondering if Catherington had a dog, and what sort of shooting Catherington would make of it if he came back and caught him there. All the time he was frantically trying to free his rifle-barrel of the obstruction, for, like most good shots, he felt undone without his arm, and he was still at the process when two motors arrived with the police. They had been only twelve minutes, but Golder Green cursed them for having been hours!

Silently and swiftly the cottage was surrounded, and as silently and swiftly the 'White Elephant'—glaring and flashing as if horribly malicious—was removed from its hiding-place by the Inspector (he cut his hand on the oyster-shell's edge in so doing), and Golder Green's name and address were duly noted for the reward.

Then the Inspector knocked at the front-door of the cottage of Andrew Catherington. 'Tsh!' he ejaculated, half to himself; 'I could never have believed 'twas him. Known him for years.'

'So've I,' allowed Golder Green. 'Had oysters of him. Last man in the world'—

'Those are usually the ones,' cut in Stirland Botly.

And the Inspector nodded approval and admiration as a bedroom window above creaked up, and the sleepy voice of Andrew Catherington, attired in a night-shirt, as revealed by a candle, demanding to know what 'in 'ell all the row's about,' came down to them.

'Just step down for a minute, please, Mr Catherington, will you?' replied the Inspector. 'I wish to speak to you. It won't take a moment.'

Andrew Catherington paused a moment erect, his hands raised against the lifted

window, his remarkably wide shoulders framed against the candle-light in the room behind, looking down upon them. Then, 'Certainly,' he shouted. 'Give me 'alf a mo' to put on somethin', an' I'll be there. What! one o' my chaps on th' boats in trouble again?'

'Something of that, maybe,' was the reply.

And Andrew Catherington sighed the sigh of all employers of rough labour. 'All right,' he said. 'Bail, 'e wants, I suppose?' and he vanished back into his room.

Then they waited out there in the dark, while the candle in the room seemed slowly to fade, as if it burnt itself out while they watched.

Five minutes they waited, and the Inspector banged peremptorily upon the door. Ten minutes, and the Inspector took to kicking. Eleven—and the door gave to their combined assault, plus a crow-bar.

As they ran into the utter darkness of the passage within, Stirland Botly tripped and almost fell over some soft and warm thing trying to make its way out. He stooped and caught it, holding it up in the glare of Golder Green's electric pocket-lamp. Then he dropped it with a gasp.

'Great heavens!' spluttered Golder Green,

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‘It’s the cat—*my* cat!’ And Stirland Botly laughed oddly.

It was undoubtedly the vanished cat, though how on all the earth it got there, or why it was *there* of all places in the wide world, was a mystery past understanding.

Stirland Botly was not surprised when the most thorough search of the cottage failed to discover Andrew Catherington—failed, in fact, to discover any living thing, beyond Golder Green’s amazing cat, afore mentioned, and Andrew Catherington’s deaf old housekeeper, sound asleep and obviously utterly innocent, in her bedroom. It was dead-certain that nothing more tangible than an invisible spirit could have got past the close-drawn police cordon. Andrew Catherington was not on the roof or in the air above; nor did any tapping of floors or stones of cellar, or walls or ceilings, reveal the least hope that he was in the walls between or in the earth beneath. He had gone, simply and without explanation—vanished like smoke. He had sauntered into Spookland, and—‘His place knew him no more,’ quoted Stirland Botly disgustedly, as the vast-faced Inspector announced that nothing short of demolishing the cottage and its foundations, apparently, would be likely, so far as he could see, to reveal even so much as the route by which

their quarry had gone. 'And *will* know him no more, if I'm any judge,' finished the great detective in a tone of settled gloom. 'Well, he's lost his great chance, and I've lost mine, and'—he spread out his hands resignedly—'Golder Green, old man, you've got yours. Such is life.'

And Golder Green smiled his slow, sorrowful smile, and was dumb.

When at last Golder Green and his guest got back to the dining-room of the former's house they were tired men, and one was a happier man. Of course, as Stirland Botly allowed, his would be the fame for finding the great stolen diamond, and that, even though he could not add the body of the 'fence' to it, would make him even more surely than he had already made himself, but it was not quite the same as if Andrew Catherington had actually been captured.

'Nevertheless, I'm glad,' mused the private detective. 'It was fair sporting work, and he's too fine a master to languish in a cell.' As he spoke he set down upon the dining-room table the whisky-and-soda Golder Green had just handed him, and then suddenly frowned. He lifted up his glass, and took from underneath it a note that he happened to have set the tumbler down upon. 'Here's

a note for you,' he announced to Golder Green, handing him the paper. 'It wasn't on the table when we went out. Some one from inside must have put it here *after* we went.'

Golder Green took the note, and stared. He opened it, read it, and—went on staring. In fact, he stared so long, so stonily, and in such utter silence that Stirland Botly, who had been making some notes, looked up sharply and went over to him with speed, as if he thought the artist was about to have a fit.

'Hullo! Anything up?' he jerked quickly, and Golder Green laughed, as a man may laugh when a spell is broken.

'Only this,' he replied, with his half-sad, half-cynical smile. 'Read it.'

And Stirland Botly read, in crabbed handwriting, this:

'DEAR SIR,—Although you lost for me the crowning triumph of my life, I am glad to say I am sportsman enough to be glad—for the sake of your bonnie kiddies. I am rich enough not to mind much. You are poor enough to care. And I don't envy the poor devil who gets the "White Elephant," anyway.

'It will be near enough for you if you know me as the uneducated oyster-merchant, Andrew Catherington,

'Yours truly,'

And Stirland Botly swore. 'The underground passage!' he snapped, grabbing Golder Green's arm. 'It must be true, and no legend; and it must have run to his cottage, as well as to this house. No wonder the cat vanished. I suppose cats like him.' He turned and made two quick strides towards the telephone in the hall, then stopped with a shrug and came back. 'What's the use?' he grunted. 'I guess he's miles across the Channel by now in a racing motor-boat.' This, as a matter of fact, was quite, quite true; and, so far as is known, he has never come back.

Oddly enough, that subterranean passage was never found. Golder Green's theory is that Catherington had the power to demolish it in some way in his last retreat, and perhaps that was true. But what matters it, anyhow? Everybody was more or less satisfied, even the unhappy owner of the 'White Elephant.' But that sinister jewel was stolen again—by a coloured gentleman—and this time went straight as a homing bee back to its appointed place; and that was in the eye-socket of a one-eyed god. At least, I suppose it went straight. Anyway, the god in question, eyeless for over a hundred years, suddenly got back its great diamond eye recently, and there cannot, one hopes, be *two* 'White Elephants' in the world.

THE BULLET.

Look, you have cast out Love ! What gods are these
You bid me please ?
To my own gods I go.
It may be they shall give me greater ease.

I WAS aware of him first as I sat outside my tent smoking my after-supper cigarette. My 'boy,' close beside me, turned his head suddenly and looked towards the little camp-fires—each a twinkle in the sunset—where my porters were preparing their evening meal, started, and went on clearing away supper from the little camp-table as if nothing had happened.

A man was moving among the squatting porters towards my tent, his khaki shirt and broad hat, splashed with the last red light, standing out against the blue haze of the camp-fires' smoke and that other blue haze of nature's smoking earth that shrouded the background of forest-trees and massed creepers. He moved in and out among the fires at a swift, silent trot, with almost the peculiar, light, bounding stride affected by some of the tribes of East Africa, and he made no sound in the coming.

Once he stopped to speak swiftly to a tall K'sai warrior, who was acting for the time being as my guide. I saw the foot-long blade of the black's spear glint crimson to the vanishing sun as he made a sign of obeisance, and—I dropped my cigarette.

There was reason—very good reason—for that sign was one that the proud K'sai make only to their paramount chief and—yes, perhaps to the king. Who, therefore, could be this visitor, this white man—for I could see he was that—who ran after the fashion of a savage and received the salute of kings?

In a moment the man was beside me, had saluted, and dropped with a laugh into a camp-chair my personal 'boy' brought forward with the grand air.

'Are you the Deputy-Assistant Commissioner?' asked the man, speaking with a peculiar ringing softness all his own.

'I am.'

'Then I'm awfully glad to meet you. I'm Liss.'

'Ah!'

I had guessed as much almost before he spoke. Leslie Liss, the mysterious Englishman, who had come to Africa with his two sons on a hunting-trip to try to forget that his wife had run away with another man, and

who had never gone away again. People sometimes called him, half in jest, the 'Lion King of the K'sai,' because he had killed many of the lions that raided the cattle-kraals of the richest cattle-owning tribe in East Africa, and received in consequence almost their worship.

The man was undoubtedly a gentleman. It is necessary to lay stress on this point; otherwise one might have mistaken him for a savage at first. He was as quiet as one, and as secret; and to see him and his two sons hunting lion was a sight worth going far to witness; but—well, the spirit of freedom had struck deep into him. He was bound by no conventionalities. He did that which seemed best to him at the moment.

With me it did not matter; I was the D.A.C. But what if one had friends? And I had friends coming next day, in fact—a rich, influential 'home' man and his new wife, bound on a big-game hunting-trip.

I had pitched camp here at this spot to await their caravan. Fensham was a man with a 'pull;' I could not afford to offend him. But he had never been to Africa before, and—the thought made me sweat—he might not understand Liss. Moreover, he was a 'bean-fed' man—a product of civilisation and

pavements—and I had heard that Liss was not a man to hide his contempt at the best of times.

There are so few of 'Us' in East Africa, and the blacks are so very many, that we must, of course, make the most of each other when we meet. Besides, I was genuinely glad to see and welcome Liss to my camp. He was an attractive man, and clever. When he chose he could talk almost wonderfully. His knowledge of wild beasts was amazing.

All the same, I must confess I caught myself wondering more than once how I could get rid of my companion before the arrival of my friends.

At last, knowing Liss to be rather shy, I determined on a bold course. I mentioned casually whom I was expecting, and when; but I was not prepared for the effect of my announcement. I heard Liss gasp exactly as a man gasps when his enemy, creeping up behind, sticks a knife between his ribs—upwards. I looked round at once.

He was in the act of lighting his pipe, but the match never reached the bowl. It stayed in mid-air, and over it I saw that Liss had suddenly turned the colour of ivory. I cannot convey the expression of pain that shone in his eyes.

For one moment he remained thus rigid, stricken, frozen. The next I heard his jaws clench with a snap, saw him shake his head, and was aware that he had risen—was, in fact, standing over me and speaking—speaking between clenched teeth.

“There may be heaven; there is certainly hell. Meantime, there is our life on earth here. We—ell?” I must really turn in now. It’s awfully late, and I must be off hunting at the first streak of dawn. Thanks no end for your kindness and all that, old man. My camp is yours to use when next we meet.’

Those were his words as he held out his hand.

Then he turned and disappeared into his tent, which his own body-servants—who seemed to have turned up from nowhere during the course of the evening as mysteriously as their master—had already set up for him close to my own. But if the name of my friends had been the name of the chief of all the fiends incarnate, it could scarcely have produced a more extraordinary effect upon a mortal.

When I got up next morning—though it was very early—Liss was gone, had apparently walked into the dim dawn as silently and mysteriously as he had stepped out of the

sunset on the previous evening—he and his men and his tent.

Fensham turned up that day, very pink and washen, with his wife and their ‘safari,’ and I was duly introduced. Personally, I am one of those old-fashioned people who hold that ‘safari’ life is no place for a woman. Yet, if there was one woman that I might have excepted, it was Fensham’s new wife.

She was plump, bland, and smiling. She smiled by habit, I think—which is better than scowling—and she was the best and coolest shot—for a woman—that I have ever seen. I was privileged that afternoon to take her up to her first old bull gnu. She took the shot sitting at a hundred and fifty yards with a little ‘28-bore shot-and-ball gun scarcely heavier than a walking-stick, and the gnu dropped in his tracks where he stood without saying anything at all.

‘But,’ she murmured, as the ejected empty cartridge-case described an arc over her right shoulder, ‘a lion is what I want, and I *know* I can drop him in his tracks with my magnum ‘12-bore, just like that.’

I thought she could too, not alone because her magnum fired a 730-grain pointed bullet at 1500 feet per second, but because some one—and this can hardly have been Fensham,

who did not shine on 'safari'—had taught her with a master-hand.

One only I knew who was capable of such teaching—for from the habits of the game, and the correct spots to aim at, down to 'trajectory' and 'allowance,' she knew it all—and he—I laughed at the idea. It was, of course, utterly impossible.

Now, those who know East Africa will tell you that you may live there for years, yearning, like Tartarin of Tarascon, 'for lions,' and never see so much as the tuft of black hair on the tip of the tail of one, or—you may be carried off by one on your first night. It is all a matter of luck—a chance in the lap of the red gods that called you out.

For this reason, therefore, although lions shook the darkness of our camp nightly, and Fensham increased the guard of armed *askaris* (soldiers) round his tent from two to four, and sat up half the time with a .500 Express across his knee, directly the very first hint of dawn made the trees stand out like ghosts with feet in silver pools, every lion within a radius of many miles seemed to saunter into Spookland and be no more. The king of beasts absolutely refused to allow Mrs Fensham her longed-for chance of 'dropping him.'

Then on a day, out of the mist and the

mystery of dawn, flitted a shadow. It paused, it hovered hawk-wise on the flanks of the camp, and then, suddenly—naked as the new-born day that was rushing up in seconds over the endless trees—it was squatting by my side.

Until you know them, this ghostly habit of the African negroes is, to say the least of it, startling. For instance, you are alone outside your tent on the eve of night. You look round, and at your shoulder stands, immovable as a tree-trunk, a black shape that had not been there a moment before. I was used to this, however. By virtue of my official position all people came to me, and they of all tribes.

I gravely returned the salute.

The man was a N'kanda, a race of hunters so utterly nomad that the very beasts have almost come to look upon them as beasts themselves.

For a few minutes the man, squatting on his hams, his bow against his shoulder, gazed straight at the ground in front of him, giving no more sign of life than a sleeping monkey. Then he spake—to the ground, apparently, or to himself: 'The *bwana* [master] wants lions. I will show him lions.'

I was all attention at once. 'How far?' asked I, speaking a bastard tongue of the land

round about, the N'kanda having no language of their own.

'A little way.'

Now, the 'mile and a bit' of the Irishman and the 'a little way' of the African negro are about the same distance, so I questioned him further.

'A day's march? Half-a-day's march? When the sun is so high'—I pointed at the now resplendent, flaming orb of day—'or so high?'

'How do I know? A little way.'

'Ah! How many lions?'

This flabbergasted him completely, and I was forced to call up my negro interpreter.

'Sam,' I said, 'get it out of him somehow.'

Sam wrestled with him forthwith in about half-a-dozen heathen dialects that sounded for the most part like a gagged man choking. Then Sam got it, and turned to me in triumph.

'Sar, he says there are two lions—a bull and a hen.'

I bowed my acknowledgments. It was all I could do under such stupendous linguistic fire.

'Go,' I said to my 'boy,' 'and awake the new master.'

My 'boy' went immediately to call Fensham, but the name he muttered under his breath

was used to denote a milch-cow, a fat one, with little hair on, and had nothing at all to do with 'new master.' Negroes have a habit of dubbing their white 'lords' with names of their own devising, denoting something of which the said 'lord's' appearance reminds them. I have good reason to believe that in private my zealous following alluded to me as 'the wart hog'—I who, though young, had grown old and ugly, hard and worn with fever, in the service of this land of regrets.

We found those lions that morning about ten o'clock—Mr and Mrs Fensham, myself, and our gun-bearers and *syces* (grooms), and the old N'kanda hunter—found them in grass so short that one would have thought it could not have hidden a dog. It hid them, however, save when, as they did from time to time, they lifted their heavy heads to glare at us.

The N'kanda had already told me that the lions had not killed that night—which was bad; and we now discovered them eating the very few carrion remains which the jackals, hyænas, and vultures had left of a zebra killed by another lion a night or two before—and that was worse, very much worse.

I did not care for the task of taking a woman up to a lion at all; but two lions, and those reduced to carrion-eating! I thanked

the powers that I had with me my '400 Express, and that behind me was a gun-bearer with my spare '425 magazine-rifle.

We dismounted and advanced in line—I on the right, and Fensham a little to the right of and in front of his wife, who was on the left wing. About fifty yards from Mrs Fensham, on her right-front, was a clump of wait-a-bit thorn, which was connected by a thin line of scrub to heavier cover beyond.

I will not describe Fensham's advance. It was his first lion, anyhow. He had insisted, in his somewhat objectionable way—against my forcible advice—on being taken up to the beasts with his wife; but when it came to the point, I think he was ashamed or not strong-minded enough to draw back, or he would have done so. He must have opened and closed his Express half-a-dozen times to see if the cartridges were in.

Mrs Fensham was entirely cool. And as for me—well, it is my business to slay lions when they become too obstreperous, and all in the day's work; but I confess I never liked a lion-hunt less than I did this one.

The lions showed no inclination to bolt. On the contrary, they came forward, the lion—a shaggy old murderer—a little in advance, and crouched. I knew by the signs that

things would quickly come to a head, and I saw that those lions must die, and die at once, if we all wished to live. There was real rage in the lashing tails, and their growlings were awful.

It was Fensham's shot. He had tossed up for first shot with his wife and won, and I was merely the reserve. He carried a .500 Express, which weighed about six pounds more than he could handle. I called out to him to shoot, and shoot quickly; but he dwelt on his aim, holding his breath a long time, and that is fatal. Then he fired, both barrels practically together, and—I swore under my breath.

The lion turned clean over, backward, in the air. I saw a spurt of dust fly up from one bullet, at any rate. The other must have hit. I heard also the dry, coughing grunt that heralds a charge, and almost before I could move I was aware that the lion had spun about quicker than thought, and that next instant both the beasts were hurling straight at us in low, long bounds.

My mind moved swiftly. If Fensham had hit the lion with one bullet anywhere decently at all, the terrible smashing-power of the .500 Express bullet ought to take effect in a few seconds.

B.T.

F

The lioness was unwounded, and meant to drive her charge home. You could see that. She was overtaking and passing the lion. I selected her, and fired instantly. She acknowledged receipt of the first shot with a stumble and a rending roar, but she kept on. At the second she came down in a whirling, yellow, clawing heap.

I knew she was done for.

Swiftly then I turned to take my second rifle from my gun-bearer. He was gone—flying wild-eyed across the plain—and my rifle was gone with him. Feverishly I set to reloading. My fingers seemed all thumbs. I believe I swore fearfully. And even as I did so I knew that I could not reload before the lion reached Mrs Fensham.

Fensham ought to have reloaded by this time—his gun-bearer also having fled—but I know now that he lost his head, ran a little way, and then started to cram fresh cartridges in upon the empty ones he had not removed. He was still struggling when suddenly, without the slightest warning, slowly, vibrant with reproachful yearning, mournful appeal, there rang out upon the hot air one word—‘Mummy.’

I glanced up dumbfounded. None of us three had spoken, and there was no one else.

Moreover, it was not the voice of any of us. My eyes flew to Mrs Fensham. Till then she had been quite cool, and I feel sure would have dropped the lion all right enough, especially as the gun-bearer—carefully selected by me—stood staunch. But the effect of that cry upon her was shocking.

Instead of firing at the lion, now close upon her, she was standing rigid, like a woman of stone, staring—staring at the thicket of wait-a-bit whence the cry had come, and her face was the colour of marble.

‘Shoot, Mrs Fensham!’ I roared, ramming home the last cartridge like a maniac. At the same time I ran out shouting wildly, hoping against hope that the lion would make one of those lightning swerves from the motionless towards the moving person that *Felis Leo* often indulges in. But it was too late.

I saw the beast shorten his stride before I could throw my Express up. I saw him rise to strike, and at the same moment I was conscious of hearing that unmistakable sound which can only be written ‘phtt,’ and is only made by a bullet striking flesh and bone.

I beheld the lion collapse literally in mid-air with a single roar more appalling than I ever yet heard issue from the jaws of any beast—collapse, and doubling up limply, anyhow, go

rolling over and over past Mrs Fensham, a lifeless, maned heap. It was as if he had in that instant been struck by lightning, blasted utterly from life in a breath. Never in all my experience had I seen a lion shot so completely and instantaneously dead. It was an amazing sight.

I was dazed a little with relief and released strain, and it must have been quite half-a-minute, as I stood there like a fool staring, before *the fact*, the astounding miracle and mystery of the whole affair, suddenly flashed in upon my mind.

‘Merciful heavens above!’ I gasped, clutching my head. ‘*There was no report.*’

No more there was. The wonder was no hallucination—unless I had gone suddenly deaf.

I hurried at once to the centre of the scene. Mrs Fensham was lying upon the grass, her face in her hands, sobbing as if her heart would break, and instinctively I felt that it was not the lion’s charge that had affected her. Fensham was kneeling beside her, rocking as he knelt, the sweat pouring from head and face in streams. And it appeared to me that I was so obviously not wanted there that I turned from them to the lion.

The beast was lying a few yards away, stone-

dead. He was on his left side, a fine massive epitome of brute power, but well past his prime. Along his right shoulder was a deep flaming groove, a surface wound only, and it alone would not have stopped him in weeks. That was the result of Fensham's first shot. The second, I knew, had missed clean. What, then, was that 'phtt' which I could have sworn I heard, *and* what had killed the lion?

Stooping hastily, I examined him carefully.

Just behind the point of the huge right shoulder was a little mark, such as might have been made if one had stuck a penknife into him. That was all. Nothing else from head to tail—at least, nothing else on that side of the body.

Straightening up, I ordered our followers, who had returned by then, and were gathered in an awe-struck, oddly-dumb crowd, to turn the beast over.

Not a man moved.

I bit my lip, and repeated the order peremptorily, only to be met by a stolid stare. Again, and this time savagely—for I had been through rather a strain—I gave the order, but the men stood like cherry-wood images, saying nothing at all.

Up then and spake my gun-bearer : ' Master, we dare not touch till K'sai says so.'

‘What?’ I thundered. ‘Since when have safari porters taken orders from the K’sai against a British officer?’

There was no answer. The men stood motionless.

Then I turned in a passion, I must admit. ‘Give,’ I growled, ‘the order to these dogs—cattle-herder!’ and I flung the last word out with as great an amount of contempt as I was capable of.

The K’sai guide looked at me with dignity. Then, stepping forward, he laid the flat of his venomous foot-long spear-blade across the shaggy mane. ‘Turn,’ grunted he, and stood back.

Instantly, as if the Devil had given the command, the heavy beast was heaved over, and then I was dumb.

On the lion’s left shoulder, or just in front of it rather, at a spot, in fact, where the pen-knife would have come out if driven straight on its course from the stab on the other side, was a hideous, blazing gap, a hole into which one could have put four fingers.

No wonder the lion had ceased to be ’twixt breath and breath—in a flash. The bullet that made that wound must have blown the beast’s heart to bits, and possibly one or both lungs as well. It was a gruesome sight. But

what miraculous bullet under heaven, so small and yet so terrible, could accomplish that miracle? And why was there no report?

I looked about me at the black faces, blank as stones; at the great candelabra trees whispering something that I could not understand; at the burnt grass plain, curtained on the horizon by a plume of dust that hid a stampeding herd of zebra; and at the dancing heat haze between; and the only answer to my question was the heart-broken sobbing of Mrs Fensham.

Then I walked over to the wait-a-bit thicket and behind it. Silence only—nothing more. The ground was everywhere too dry to retain a footprint, though probably a native would have read a whole story in signs that were hidden from me. In fact, I was turning away with a bewildered shrug, when the glint of sun playing through branches on brass below flashed to my eye.

Something had been thrown in there that was not meant to be found, and after a certain amount of bad language and scratching I fished it out. It was an empty brass cartridge-case, such as is used for modern high-velocity magazine-rifles, and on it was marked 'Ross-Eley '280.'

Then I saw light a little. We had not in East Africa become acquainted with the new

rifle firing a very small bullet with the astounding velocity of 3000 feet per second at muzzle. We had only heard rumours or seen illustrations of such miracles. Nor did we know that the bullet fired from such a rifle produced on the animal hit a peculiar, paralysing effect, which could not be accounted for in the science of ballistics—produced, in fact, a collapse not warranted merely by the force of the blow. And, thirdly, we had not tried, though we had heard of, that other wonder, the Maxim silencer, a contrivance fitted to the muzzle of the rifle which eliminates the report.

The ride home was not a cheerful one. Mrs Fensham was conveyed in a litter. She sobbed all the way, yet it was not her nerve that had been broken. Judging by the sounds, I think it must have been her heart, and—well, the lion could not have done that.

Fensham did not converse with me at much length. In fact, so far as I remember, he did not speak to me at all. He spoke to himself mainly, muttering in a quick and nervous way, 'We must get out of this! We must get out of this! He'll never forget'—speaking the words, for the most part, into his horse's ears.

I felt depressed and miserable with a

sorrow and a mystery I could not understand. It was as if a Hand brooded over us. And besides—— Look here, you may laugh if you like, but you know that feeling, the slight pain low down in the back of the head, that feeling of constrictive uneasiness which comes over you when some one is looking at you without, so to speak, your knowing it?

Well, not once, but many times, on our ride home through the thick bush that feeling laid hold of my heart. So intense did it become at last that, for the life of me, I could not help turning in the saddle to stare at the tall grass and the bushes closing back into space after our passage. There was nothing there, of course, and I was a fool, I who—— Stop! If I was a fool, then I fooled in company.

Fensham must have been oppressed by the same feeling, for I noticed that every half-dozen strides he would turn in a shying, ready-to-bolt sort of way, as I have seen a suspicious deer do, and glare hard at the bushes; whilst, to my stupefaction, my men were crowding in upon me, with furtive glances over their shoulders, in a manner that I have only seen them do when we have been marching through high grass swarming with rhinoceros.

‘What do you fear, oh warrior?’ I said suddenly, speaking in his tongue to the K’sai

guide, whose tall, lithe form moved just ahead of my horse now.

‘For myself, nothing. For you, nothing. For the ——’ (here he used the name denoting a milch-cow with little hair, about which I have told you)—‘for him I fear.’

I spurred my horse up alongside him. ‘Fear what?’

The man turned and looked up at me hard between the eyes. ‘That which slew the lion. That which the “master” feared when I saw him turn in his saddle just now to look back.’

‘Ah, and what is that?’

The man dropped his eyes on the ground. All trace of expression left his face. ‘How do I know?’

I reined in back to my place. So far as he was concerned I might as well try to wring information out of a fallen tree. That look and those words closed the interview. I knew those words, had heard them before. There is no getting beyond them with these people.

If, however, the ride home was bad, the day in camp which followed was worse. I tried to write some ‘home’ letters, but couldn’t, and took to cleaning my rifles instead, having nothing whatever to do. And all the time I felt that *some one* was watching me with a

hungry look, some one who wanted something very much, and could not ask for it. And all the time, too, the sounds of an unspeakable grief went on in the Fenshams' tent.

Never have I heard a woman cry after that fashion, and never do I want to do so again. It was not merely awful; it was terrifying. It sent me half-mad to listen to it. It was like a lost soul crying in space over a sorrow it could never shake off. Even my men, for the first time in my recollection, moved about their duties in silence, and were dumb over their food. I could eat nothing at lunch. Fensham did not appear upon the scene.

About sundown—that time which even at the best is full of sadness—the importunities of that invisible *some one*, and that unspeakable sobbing, became absolutely unendurable.

I could bear it no longer, and jumping up, walked a little way out of camp to a place where two rhinoceros paths joined, and the united broad path ran—a railway-like cutting through the elephant-high, interminable thorn-scrub, straight into the red eye of the setting sun.

It was rather a peculiar scene, and a very desolate one; also, it was very African. As I stood under the shadow of an acacia I could hear the whir-r-r-r-r of the sand-grouse, flying

in coveys to the water, and the rustle of little antelopes going down to the evening drink.

Then an elephant trumpeted suddenly on the wooded hills very far away, and the spur-winged plover, that had been weaving wailing circles in the evening sky till then, was still, and I was left alone in silence to my own thoughts and a sudden feeling of apprehension.

The apprehension grew and grew as an enemy grows in a nightmare, until, just as I was going to move and break the spell and the silence which had become tense as a drawn wire, a leopard broke, like a blown puff of gray smoke, across the path in front of me, and, without warning, a rhinoceros—goodness knows how long he had been standing there!—detached himself from his surroundings about fifty yards away, and snorting after the fashion of a locomotive, came past me at no more than ten yards, going at full speed.

I felt the ground shake at that mighty passing. Straight into the eye of the setting sun went he. And, by the same token, I knew that the wireless telegram that had set both beasts in motion must of necessity come from the opposite direction.

I turned my head where I stood, therefore, and—nearly dropped my rifle.

Six men were coming down the other path, and three of them were white. Also, they ran, all of them—ran not as men pursuing, or men pursued, but because they were accustomed to run, silently, lightly, easily, as a wolf runs, in single file; ran, moreover, with the air of men who were aware of miles to run before them.

It was a singular sight in that setting, remembering always the magic of the scene and the uncanny light, the more singular perhaps because I knew these men—all of them—by description at any rate.

First, an ebon giant, terrible in that glare—the paramount chief of the K'sai; second—lithe, broad-shouldered, wiry, steely almost—Liss; third—slim, tall, his fair hair showing like white against the deep tan of him—Liss's eldest son; fourth—rolling in his gait, deep-chested, heavy-shouldered, wondrously powerful—the ever-smiling presence of Liss's second son; fifth and sixth—more slender than their father, tall, bounding like antelopes—the chief's two sons.

I held my breath as they passed me, as had the rhinoceros, at the junction of the paths. Then I gasped—gasped because plainly I saw—no, I am quite positive, and, besides, there could be no room for error at that distance—

that Liss and his two sons carried each a certain *sporting magazine-rifle*—the kind that takes the Ross-Eley .280 cartridge—and that on the muzzle of each—again there could be no mistake—was that little additional blob which denotes the presence of an attached *Maxim silencer*.

There seemed to have been no interval between the stunning realisation of this fact and the murmuring wail of a little voice of agony in my ear.

The voice seemed to be lost and in pain, so that it could not refrain from talking about its trouble to the silent evening.

‘Leslie! My boys! Oh, my God!’

And turning, barely in time, I staggered back gasping, with the dead weight on my arm of—Mrs Fensham, falling and unconscious.

When I next had time to look up for a second the procession had passed over the rise, and was no more to be seen.

Yet—truly it may only have been spoken by Fensham himself, blundering up, crashing through the cover, or the voice of some bird of the night oddly transformed to resemble human speech, or even the imaginings of my overwrought brain—it seemed to me that, before the procession vanished, there breathed upon the still air, so tenderly, so reproachfully,

that surely angels might have wept to hear it, the single word, 'Agnes!'

Now, Agnes was Mrs Fensham's Christian name, and, anyway, not even Leslie Liss or the trained eyes of his companions could have made us out in the inky shadow under the acacia at that range, so perhaps I was wrong.

Personally I like to think I wasn't, because Mrs Fensham seemed miraculously to regain consciousness at that moment, and opening her eyes as the word breathed through the mist—'twere profanity to use any other expression—smiled a faint, suddenly happy smile, and became again unconscious. It was as if she had felt the word coming, and had awakened specially to hear it.

Next morning, before it was light, nearly three months before they meant to return, Fensham, with his 'safari,' and his wife in a litter, left on the journey back to the railway. Mrs Fensham had not yet regained consciousness. It was imperative to get her back to civilisation as quickly as possible.

Returning through camp after riding with them all day on their way, I happened to pass near to the spot where Mrs Fensham's tent had stood, and seeing something glint in the sun there, I dismounted to pick it up.

It was a plain gold wedding-ring strung

on a piece of thin mauve ribbon, such as might be used to hang the thing round a woman's throat as a keepsake. And inside were engraved the words, 'A. and L. Liss.'

Then I understood.

FLIES.

HARVEY-DOTTRELL stood close down by the mud-ooze, staring out across the miles of pock-marked flats, desolate of all life except the green scum, and a gull or two, like chalk lumps, here and there. A red disc of a sun on fire sat on ruby and smoking clouds, and the sky around and above was piled in angry confusion as cities aflame.

Harvey-Dottrell laughed, and the laugh, or a peculiar, nasty ring in it, disturbed a little ringed plover, invisible on the mud till then, so that it detached itself from its surroundings, and went away on hooked wings, piping plaintively.

Close to Harvey-Dottrell's feet the tide, draining out from the old and ruined oyster-beds behind his back, charged past in a narrow channel with a song like a Highland stream. A crab crawled slowly and sideways towards it from almost under his heel. A lean, narrow, rakish-looking sort of a fly suddenly batted on to his hand from nowhere special.

And in all the miles, even though so close to a great seaport city, Harvey-Dottrell was

as utterly alone as if he had been in the great Sahara.

‘A man might die here,’ he muttered, ‘and never be missed;’ and, sulking the action to the thought that prompted his words, he raised his little American .22-calibre repeating-rifle, and, turning it wrong end round, placed its cold, hard muzzle against his temple. Stretching out his right hand, he put his finger upon the trigger. It was all quite easy and simple—so easy and simple to end everything.

Five miles away as the crow is supposed to fly, in a dirty street, a street of many streets, street upon street, in the big seaport city, his wife was sitting with the children—four children, all under seven. Close beside her stood a writing-desk, locked, into which she had never seen. It contained, among other things, Harvey-Dottrell’s pass-book, which revealed the fact that he had exactly four pounds in the bank. Beneath this, in an envelope, was his insurance policy for eighty pounds. And that was all. And so far as Harvey-Dottrell could see, it was going to be all—the end. There was no earthly chance of anything else, and he must die; he could not face the alternative.

Seven months ago Harvey-Dottrell had invented a preparation which absolutely pre-

vented flies, mosquitoes (which are flies), fleas (which also are flies), and other animated horrors of insect form from settling upon human beings who had sprinkled themselves with a little of the mixture. It might not seem much, but it meant that sleeping-sickness, fever, malaria, yellow-fever, and other plagues of the flesh were as nothing to the possessor of a little of this preparation. It meant that thousands of white men's lives would be saved yearly. It meant that hundreds of thousands of square miles of land, deadly and uninhabitable to the white man till then, could be safely opened up. It meant—oh! dozens upon dozens of wonderful things, and Harvey - Dottrell knew it. He knew it too well. He had given up his profession to run it, and—failed. Nobody would believe him, and a letter from his last hope, an 'official department'—a letter to say so—lay in his pocket at that moment. Thus he had ruined himself; with an invention worth hundreds of thousands of pounds in his pocket, he was penniless, or nearly so, and he was going to be a coward, an utter coward, and die.

You see, he could have faced the comparative poverty of his profession and worked his way up, but the discovery of his fly preparation made him sure that he would at once become

wealthy, made him build, ah, such fine castles ! And the cold, stark, bitter disappointment of finding that the discovery was so wonderful that no one would credit it, or take it up, was too much for him. He would die. He meant it. He was a man quite capable of carrying out his intention, and quite coolly, too, at that.

The fly returned and batted on his hand again, his right hand, and tickled a little with a peculiar irritating touch of pain.

Harvey-Dottrell felt it, and put down his rifle to brush it away. He would put up the rifle after he had done that, and pull the trigger, and end his sufferings for evermore with a forty-five grain hollow-nose .22 long rifle-bullet, such as he used for shooting large wild-fowl. Just as if it mattered whether a fly was on his hand or not when he pulled the trigger ; but he had never blown out his brains before, you see, and quite forgot about that.

He brushed the fly away, and stood suddenly motionless. His face changed slowly from an awful set, stark determination, to one of slowly dawning surprise, but he did not move. And he remained so long thus standing motionless, with his head a little on one side, that a watcher, had there been one, would have approached nearer, to inquire what had come over him.

Four hundred yards away at its nearest point, the country-road, which cut the island in two from end to end, and stretched from the bridge affording communication with the mainland to the little, quiet, but rather fashionable watering-place on the south coast of the island, ran, rather picturesquely, mostly between trees. It was fairly crowded at that time of year—with farm traffic, local bicyclists going down to bathe, motor-cars of visitors, and so forth. Nevertheless, it did not roar. There was not enough traffic for that. Harvey-Dottrell, who had lived in those parts for many years, had never known it to do that. Now it was roaring—roaring with traffic—and the roar, beginning in quite a small way, grew and gradually grew, so that it became steady and insistent, and dominated all else.

Now and again isolated sounds stood out clearly—the shouting of men; the fiend-like blare of some motor-horn, making monster noises more diabolical than its neighbours; once the shriek of a woman, clear and shrill, that set the heart jumping; and several times the cries of children. But these only accentuated the general all-pervading steadiness of the roar, like the roar that you hear on opening the window of an attic looking up to the skies in Regent Street.

Harvey-Dottrell was dumbfounded. He stood aghast. What had happened? What was going on? Or had he gone mad in the effort of slaying himself? He stopped his ears up, and unstopped them. But it was not his ears; the sound was real, a live thing. He turned his eyes in the direction of the road, and his face became blank.

At that time of the year a thin dust-curtain usually masked the road winding among the trees, but the thin curtain was there no longer. It was a tawny pall, a vast, thick, hanging cloud, high as a house, brooding, dense and strange, stretching far as the eye could reach above and beyond the trees, which it blotted out. Never, in all his experience, even on a summer Bank Holiday, had Harvey-Dottrell seen the dust above the road like that, or even partially like that.

It was incomprehensible, inconceivable. Harvey-Dottrell forgot all about blowing out his brains, and began walking along the shore of the estuary towards the place where he could turn up a side-lane leading to the road. It was about twelve minutes' walk.

He brushed away the peculiarly insistent fly, as he walked, several times, until it was joined by two other flies, and a wasp—peculiar in such a place—come for moisture, and he was

forced to put a little of his own preparation out of a bottle, which he always carried, on to his handkerchief. Flies and wasps instantly vanished.

The sight of the road, as he came to it round a twist in the lane, stopped Harvey-Dottrell dead. The noise had been bad enough, but the view was worse—much worse—and he held his hand to his head, as if he thought he had gone suddenly crazed. He had not, however. It was the road that was mad, or the inhabitants of Cocklesea Island that were upon it—rather, all the inhabitants.

The narrow neck of the lane gave him a circumscribed round view of the road, under an arch of green that was now tawny, like looking through a telescope. He saw a gipsy-van and a farm-wagon almost locked together, and a vision of man-beaten horses, nearly black with sweat, straining mightily; he saw also a light car, packed to the top of her wind-screen with flannelled men, beating off a swarm of pedestrians that hung to her like flies; he beheld a donkey pulling half a family, the other half pulling, or pushing, the donkey; he beheld, too, a brewer's dray and two great plunging horses, breast-deep in struggling bicyclists; he watched a carriage and pair, both horses on end, bravely restrained by two unhatted

footmen, and a little old lady with a white parasol inside cheek by jowl with an unshaven tramp who had climbed up and was hanging over the shade at the back ; he viewed a milk-float, filled with squealing children, a spring-cart more than filled with a squealing and enormously fat old woman, lashing vilely at a stumbling scarecrow that had once been a horse, and a woman pushing a perambulator rocking with babies ; he watched a thousand-guinea car, cream body, silver lamps, and all awink in the sun, full of pretty, but very white, faces, and frills and frocks and big hats, with two farm-labourers standing on the step, and a ragged small boy hanging on behind, and, almost treading on it, a ramshackle furniture-van, packed with, not the furniture, but the inmates, of a household and any of the crowds of pedestrians that could squeeze in. Five men, mopping their brows and carrying their coats, burst through the hedge in front of him, and crossed the lane, following their own line across country, as quicker than the packed road ; and four children, carrying two smaller children, all crying, followed them. And all were going one way—northwards to the one road-bridge that led to the mainland.

When Harvey-Dottrell reached the main road, he found that he could hardly get into it,

by reason of the struggling confusion of packed motors, motor-bicycles, bicycles, wagons, carts, trucks, and people on foot, that dragged, fought, pushed, shoved, edged, rammed, drove, and strove their way along it. And the dust was awful; it filled the air like a fog, and made Harvey-Dottrell cough heavily. Some had fallen out by the wayside, and women, and even strong men, lay here and there—huddled smudges of clothes. Where there were gaps or gates, people streamed through them, only, for the most part, to stream back. If a vehicle got locked by the wheel to another, there seemed no hope for it but for them to go along locked; and if man or woman fell out in the road itself—God help 'em!

It was an awful scene, but the most awful thing of all was the faces of the people. Millionaire, pawnbroker, farm-labourer, boarding-house keeper, boarder, butcher, ice-cream vender, donkey-boy, farmer, fisherman—all held the same fixed, wide-eyed stare of fear—utter, unreasoning, and absolute terror. Thus do people act and look who flee from a plague.

True; but it was not this that had set Harvey-Dottrell suddenly gasping and clutching at his throat; it was the action of every living, hard-breathing, sweating soul he saw, for it seemed that, besides being frightened

almost beyond speech, they were also, one and all, mad—mad as the proverbial March hare. And their madness was madder than anything ever heard of, for it took the form of a delusion, apparently, that they were fleeing from flies, or wasps, or mosquitoes, or something, so that the whole road was a river of waving, beating, fanning, pawing arms, hands, handkerchiefs, papers, fans, leafy branches, hats, caps, and rolled-up articles of clothing, in one great, grotesque, strenuous, multitudinal flutter, which was so utterly absurd that it made Harvey-Dottrell leave off clutching at his throat, and burst out into a harsh and cackling laugh.

Perhaps it was the strain on his nerves. Perhaps it was the hot sun. I don't know. He certainly laughed, and as he laughed a very fat man, with a very fat woman and two 'maids,' in a great, slashing, palpitating, red, forty-horse-power car, that had stopped close by, jammed nearly into the ditch by the press of traffic around, looked up, and said, in a harsh, abrupt voice, 'What the devil are you laughing at, man? Why aren't you running away, like the rest of us? Mad?'

'Not quite,' replied Harvey-Dottrell; 'but it seems that you all are. What on earth's up?'

'Up? Oh Lord! Here's a fellow doesn't

know what's up,' the fat man shouted suddenly at the two maids, who began squealing at him, in terror, to get on, and then, to Harvey-Dottrell, 'Haven't you heard? The flies! The plague! They're carrying it all over the place. Fifteen people dead in an hour this morning. My God! Ah, here's my chance!'

The traffic ahead opened out a bit to make way for a horse, which, backed on to by a wagon ahead, suddenly seemed to have gone kicking mad. The man barged the car full into the open space, knocking the horse sideways, amid shouts and screams, and as he did so the fat woman, leaning out, yelled suddenly at Harvey-Dottrell, above the din, 'Aren't you afraid?'

And Harvey-Dottrell, who had gone all at once very white about the lips and the forehead at the mention of the word 'flies,' shook his head. 'I'm immune,' he holloaed, with a bitter laugh, and then stared, for the effect of that one word 'immune' upon the very fat woman was astounding.

There was just time, as the big car surged forward—he had been a little ahead of it when it stopped—to snatch out a visiting-card from a cream-and-gold bag thing she carried, amid numerous broad gold bracelets, on her full arm, and fling it at him. 'Go to my room in our

house at Cocklesea,' she shrieked at him, purple-faced and standing up, 'and get my jewels. There's our London address on the card. I'll give you five hundred pounds!'

She sat down with a bang as the car heaved forward, and was lost to view in a cloud of dust, petrol-fumes, horses' heads, and people's heads, sneaking in after the car, in the hope of getting through behind it, and Harvey-Dottrell was left, dazed and befogged, mechanically picking up the visiting-card almost from his feet.

Every one knows Angmering's, the great London emporium of general cheap goods. Exactly. So did Harvey-Dottrell. It was the visiting-card of Mrs Angmering that he held in his hand, and upon the card was printed the address of the house, The View, at Cocklesea, which the Angmerings had bought for week-ends, and the address of their town house.

The Angmerings were immensely wealthy; men said that nobody knew quite how rich they were, and that Mrs Angmering's jewels were worth a king's ransom—some kings' ransoms. Mrs Angmering was the stout lady of the big car, it seemed, and the rotund driver Angmering himself, no less. They must have been very hard pushed to come away without their jewels, Harvey-Dottrell reflected;

and, by the same token, their offer of five hundred pounds for the recovery of the same was probably pretty sincere. Wherefore, pondering these things, Harvey-Dottrell started to walk the two miles to Cocklesea, due south, as best he could, across the fields—the one road was out of the question.

It was not his way home, which lay in the opposite direction—that is, towards the mainland, a fifteen-minutes' tram-ride off; but no matter. He was not quite himself this afternoon. He was still tingling with the strange excitement and panic going on around him, and with another excitement that seemed to be in the air, and to be stretching everybody's nerves to breaking-point almost.

As he scrambled through the hedge, and made his way across the first field, all dotted with people straggling—and struggling—along in the opposite direction—every one in the opposite direction to him—he noticed that the sky in the west was a dull copper, though the sun still shone overhead with peculiarly brazen persistence. A puff of warm wind suddenly struck him nearly on the back of the neck—that is, from the north-west; the next puff, four minutes later, came from the north-east. Both vanished as suddenly as they had come, and there was a perfectly dead calm—

such a calm that the gulls away out on the estuary were almost unable to fly, and in the calm Harvey-Dottrell could hear them screaming all together, miles away, above the din on the road. Being an ornithologist, he knew that the feathered ones do not speak in vain. There was weather coming.

It was not a pleasant walk. The heat was too great, for one thing, and the consciousness that he was, if the panic of the populace counted for anything, walking into death for a possible five hundred pounds, was too much in charge of Harvey-Dottrell's mind to make it so. But it was at least dying for something—at any rate, putting up a fight; and that to Harvey-Dottrell was joy, as the burning of essence of ginger is joy to the man with raging toothache.

In one corner of a farm lane, under the shade of some trees, and all alone beside a little pond full of 'skaters,' he found an old man lying down, and tired out, and from him, after he had revived him with a little whisky from his flask and a few biscuits, he got enlightenment.

'It ain't no bloomin' good; ef I does 'ave this 'ere plague, maister, I be done, that's what I be, and couldn't go noways farther, not ef you was t' pay me ever so,' he

wheezed; and Harvey-Dottrell, looking at him, agreed.

‘You want an hour’s rest,’ suggested he.

‘I does; that’s a fact.’ The old fellow wiped his face, beating away the flies, which, by-the-by, were not imaginary, for the flies were most insistent, as only they can be in some country places at certain times; but it was noticeable that they all kept their distance from Harvey-Dottrell. Then he regarded Harvey-Dottrell, and stared him up and down in blank surprise. ‘But what be the matter wi’ you?’ he questioned suddenly. ‘Why bain’t you a-runnin’ for th’ bridge?’

Harvey-Dottrell smiled dubiously. ‘Firstly, I have something that keeps flies away,’ he answered. ‘Secondly, I don’t know yet what all this talk of plague is about. I’ve only just come from the shore, really.’

‘Oh, lordy!’ The old man left off beating at the flies and stared at him. ‘Don’t ye know as two London gents comed down by the 11.50 train wi’ a gurt big glass case inside o’ a gurt big wooden one, an’ th’ railway chap as was a-deliverin’ of it, ’e drops an’ smashes th’ ’ole bloomin’ bag o’ tricks, and out comes swarrms an’ swarrms o’ flies, an’ th’ two gents, they nearly goes mad? They was a-rushin’ about a-tellin’ everybody they was doctors

a-studyin' of th' plague, and that these 'ere flies, they was inoculated with this 'ere plague 'nuff t' kill every blame body on t' 'ole island 'bout ten times over, an' that they would start about a-killin' of all o' us sharp. Run? You never see'd! Most folks they jist takes an' drops whatever they was at, like, an' they run, an' they run, an' they run t' git off th' island quick 'n ever th' devil split 'em amainways.'

'How d' you know all of this, then?'

'Ow does I know? Why, 'cause I was a-sellin' oranges on th' beach just outside their 'ouse.'

'Any people die, or anything?' Harvey-Dottrell had become suddenly alert and interested.

'Die? Lord! There was one old lady, she was took a-sudden like when she 'eard 'em, an' she took an' died; an' an old toff in a barf-chair, what I knawed 'ad a weak 'eart fer years, 'e lets out a gasp when they tells 'im, an' they carries 'im out a corpse; an' any amount o' folks complained they was feelin' bad all of a sudden like. Gawd! but there was a-goin's on, I can tell 'ee, but whether 'twas th' fright, or th' flies, or th' 'eat, I dunnows. Anywhich-ways, no flies ain't a-bitten me yet, but I reckon they will time I gets goin' agin;' and the old fellow waved a huge red handkerchief

ferociously. 'Ain't you scared?' he asked, regarding Harvey-Dottrell suspiciously, after his kind.

'Not in the least, I guess. I've got something on me that absolutely prevents all flies coming near me. Try some,' Harvey-Dottrell announced enthusiastically; and before the old man could protest, he had tipped a few drops of his queer-smelling preparation upon that rampant red handkerchief.

'Thank 'ee, but I'd rather it 'ud been a pipe o' baccy,' the old fellow answered, and then he suddenly sat upright. Every fly in his vicinity had vanished. 'Well, I'll be'—— But words failed him, and he could only go on staring.

'Good enough, isn't it?' asked Harvey-Dottrell, with the air of one 'grassing' a tiger first shot.

'Lord bless my 'eart an' soul!' The old man turned and glared at the inventor with a sudden cunning interest in his rat-like eyes. 'But—*will it last?*'

'Last? Last? Yes. That is, last twenty-four hours, anyway.'

Harvey-Dottrell was too delighted with this opportunity to show off his discovery, if only to an audience of one, to notice the quick smile, hidden instantly behind the handkerchief, that convulsed the old man's features, and the furtive

look of rat-like cunning that flickered into his bright eyes.

‘Well, I ’ope it will—’ope it will. Thank ’ee, sir; thank ’ee. An’ now you’ll want to be a-goin’ on. Don’t let a old gaffer of th’ likes o’ me keep ye. Anythink important, ef I may make so bold?’

‘Only a commission for a lady who’s left a trifle behind her.’ Harvey-Dottrell tried to speak airily, but the rat’s eyes were watching him, keen as daggers, the whole time. ‘Yes, I think I will be moving. Good-day. Hope you’ll get home all right.’ And he hurried on his way.

At least, he felt, he knew more than he did before, and could fairly well grasp the situation. Possibly the Angmerings were out in their car somewhere when they caught the panic, and were afraid to go to their house; but, anyway, it did not matter to him *now*.

Harvey-Dottrell hurried on, and the sky went dark above him; the hot, brazen sun became first a copper globe, which was put out; and, looking up, he beheld a great dun cloud nearly over his head. A puff of warm wind struck him again, this time from the south-west.

By the time Harvey-Dottrell reached Cockle-sea, it was a town of the dead. Nobody moved

in its streets, and upon its beach was neither bather nor holiday-maker, nor child scampering or lounging. All visible human life had left the place, as a 'salt-pan' is left by the ebbing tide; and there was no moving thing in it all, except two dogs, that yapped, and a canary singing, singing, singing, inside a 'tea-room.'

Harvey-Dottrell knew his way, but as he turned off along the sea-front—it was a common mostly—he carefully loaded his repeating-rifle with eleven solid '22-calibre smokeless 'long-rifle' cartridges, and put plenty more where he could most easily and quickly get at them in his pocket. He had two boxes of a hundred each with him, so had no immediate cause for anxiety on that account.

Although he was a cautious man generally, and had a natural innate cunning of sorts which led him to foresee much and run few unnecessary risks, I don't think he had any real idea of what exactly lay before him. Nevertheless, when he came to the Angmerings' house—a fine, flaring, red-brick and white affair in young grounds—he entered the garden from the back, or the gardener's, door, and not by the carriage-drive, where the gold-and-chocolate gates stood.

Once inside, he stood quietly and quite motionless behind an apple-tree, listening and

watching. He feared a dog, for one thing ; a policeman—if even one remained—for another. He could not very well explain to the latter that he had come for Mrs Angmering's jewels, and the former would not have listened to him if he had.

His entrance had startled one blackbird and two starlings, looting fruit, and from various safe vantages they sat and called him rude names ; but there was no sign of beast or man, and therefore, still pausing now and again, he began to work his way from tree to bush, dodging and in approved Red-Indian style, housewards. His rifle he held obviously ready.

The sky was very dark above him, and the leaves rustled suddenly in little whisperings from time to time, with puffs of wind that came from every point of the compass. The air was breathless, as one who waits for a catastrophe, not hot exactly ; and, from far away, a breeze-puff brought the sound of a dog howling horribly.

Harvey-Dottrell had dodged his cautious way perhaps half up the garden, when the voice of a man, speaking inside the house, froze him in his stride where he crept. Things being so very still, the voice sounded plainly enough, though Harvey-Dottrell could not hear what it said. But, according to his in-

formation, there should not have been anybody in the house at all—it was a big house, such as people like the Angmerings might be expected to own—and Harvey-Dottrell was surprised.

After waiting a minute, he worked round the house by a flank movement, and from behind laurels got a view of the front-door. A motor-car was standing in the drive there, and—it was not asleep. There was nobody in the motor-car.

Harvey-Dottrell returned to the back-door under cover, always under cover, and entered. A cat, very long and narrow, with its ears cocked backwards, evacuated the kitchen for some dim fastness up a passage as he did so. The fire was nearly out, and one bright kettle contended weakly against the hum of the flies for mastery in breaking the silence.

It was a big kitchen, but Harvey-Dottrell had no concern with it, except to note—peering round the door and with a ready barrel—that it was empty.

Then he crept up the stairs to the hall—a big hall, with stags' heads about and a man in armour. There was nothing alive in the hall, but Harvey-Dottrell could hear the sound of men talking from the first floor. He retired by the way he had come, and, most silently,

ascended another set of stairs—the servants' stairs.

There was the very faintest creak in the kitchen as he got up these stairs, but it was very slight. Empty houses do creak in most mysterious fashion sometimes, and, anyway, it might have been the cat returned.

Harvey-Dottrell's arrival upon the landing of the first floor was sudden and dramatic.

Two men, quite well dressed, were coming out of a large bedroom, which, from its size and commanding south aspect, might be taken to be the Angmerings' bedroom. One of them was carrying a case, the other, two, which looked like jewel-cases. It was very close, and the black cloud had made it almost dark in the house, and the men were both sweating profusely. Also, they appeared to be in a hurry.

They were aware, in the same instant, of a bar-like gleam sliding along a raised and wicked, lean .22-calibre rifle-barrel, in the shadow by the servants' staircase; of a voice saying, 'Hands up!' and of a slight, a very slight, noise, as if a chair had been stumbled against somewhere down below. They thought they had several men, in place of one, to deal with, and they put up their hands. The jewel-cases they put on the floor.

There was a pause of exactly twenty-three

seconds, while a 'death-watch' ticked in a terrible hurry somewhere in the silence that hung like an invisible pall inside the house and out.

Then Harvey-Dottrell spoke again, trying hard to keep his voice calm. He licked his lips before the words came, for he was not used to this sort of thing.

'Who are you?' he asked.

'We've been sent to fetch Mrs Angmering's jewels,' they exclaimed together.

Harvey-Dottrell tried to believe it was a lie, but he knew that there is no knowing what some people may do when they are thoroughly frightened.

'Keep your hands up,' said he. 'And walk backwards into that room.'

They did as they were bid, Harvey-Dottrell following them towards the jewel-cases, but one of them stumbled and tripped over the carpet. He fell, and there was instant confusion. Followed the snappy, vicious crack of Harvey-Dottrell's repeater twice—it sounded loud and dangerous on the empty landing—and one of the men yelled, as you do yell if you get a .22 long rifle-bullet through the fleshy part of your thigh, and both men were on to Harvey-Dottrell at once. That was because he had been afraid of firing to kill.

To avoid being tripped by one of the men who

was diving in at him on his hands and knees, Harvey-Dottrell leaped backwards into a bedroom, where, on the far side of a gorgeous brass bedstead, he stood at bay, covering them with his repeater, and covered by them with revolvers.

The affair had come to a deadlock, and neither side knew, for a moment, quite what to do.

Evidently Harvey-Dottrell was all out, and with his life for sale. Both men could tell that instinctively. They were not. A king's ransom of jewels was worth a lot of risk, but both valued their lives at more. They hesitated for about a quarter of a minute; and, even as they did so, the thick, murky, tingling gloom, that seemed to be weighing them with lead, and playing prickly tunes up and down the nerves of all three, was riven, from floor to ceiling, with a single sheet of fire, which made them jump. An appalling, deafening, stunning crash of thunder followed. It seemed clean overhead, and made the very house rock. There was a deafening report somewhere, then utter silence, and all three distinctly heard some one hurrying down the last three or four flights of the staircase into the hall.

It was nearly dark, and a warm wind had suddenly evolved itself from nowhere, and was thrashing the trees outside. Doors banged

everywhere, for every window in the place was open ; and what with that, and the crashing of the thunder and the roaring of the wind, it was almost impossible to keep calm and tell, or hear, or see what was happening.

When the lightning came again and filled the room with a flickering green-yellow glow, Harvey-Dottrell saw that both men were running from the room.

He followed, and peered out on to the landing. A blinding flash showed him the two men leaning over the banisters, firing with their revolvers at some one they saw, or thought they saw, in the semi-darkness, going out of the front-door ; and showed him, too, as plainly as in sunlight, that there was now only one jewel-case on the landing. The other two, and those the largest, had vanished.

Harvey-Dottrell swore a vivid oath and raised his rifle ; but the thunder came again and drowned his words and the reports of the revolvers, and everything became almost dark.

The next flash of lightning showed him, what he could see in a dim way without, that the two men had turned towards him. One was re-loading his revolver, and both together were shouting out and asking him who he was, and why he wasn't afraid of the flies and the plague.

'My name's Harvey-Dottrell,' he yelled

back, between thunder-claps. 'And I've very good reason not to be afraid of infected flies.'

But if he had announced that he was Ajax, defier of the lightning, himself, it could not have had a very much more astonishing effect upon those two men.

'*Harvey-Dottrell?*' they both holloaed, nearly squealed, together; and then, as, in the middle of a flash that nearly staggered all three, he pulled the trigger, and fired close past, but not at, them, they let out one howl, and went down the servants' staircase almost as quickly as if they had been shot from a spring. It was a most extraordinary retreat, and Harvey-Dottrell was left standing, with his mouth open and his barrel lowered, in absolutely blank and stupefied amazement, alone on the landing, with one jewel-case, and the lightning splashing all over the place like eggs flung into a black box. The whole air appeared to be given over to leaping devils of flame, and in the heavens above it sounded as if giant carts of the gods were tipping mountains on to a stupendous wooden floor.

By the time Harvey-Dottrell got downstairs the motor had gone. He heard it for a moment between the thunder-peals. Also, he saw smoke issuing from a top-floor window, and seizing a fire-extinguisher (one of the home-made kind) which he found in a passage, and two buckets

of water, he raced up to the servants' bedrooms, where he found that one room was on fire a little. The house had been struck by lightning, which accounted for the report all of them had heard coincident with the first flash of lightning.

Harvey-Dottrell put the fire out easily, because he had caught it at the right time, and knew the value of acting quickly, in which case most fires can be put out; and he then came down again. He picked up the remaining jewel-case, the small one, and started upon his two-and-a-half mile walk back to the mainland. It was useless, he concluded, to look for the other jewel-cases, whoever had taken them.

It was raining hard by the time he got outside, and the dusk had come. It was also chilly, but the restless tingling in his veins had gone, his head held no more fiery cracklings, and the nervous, overstrung feeling in the air had passed with the hurrying storm. He even found himself wondering, as he slipped on his Burberry, how on earth he had been such an unmitigated ass as nearly to blow out his brains—which only shows!

Harvey-Dottrell went straight home, and quickly. He had no wish to be found running about in the wet with one of the Angmerings' jewel-cases, and on the way he telegraphed to

old Angmering a skeleton of the facts, together with his own name and address.

Next morning Angmering arrived, and in his little parlour in the little villa in the grubby duplicate street, and much bothered by the children, who would not keep out, Harvey-Dottrell told the whole story from beginning to end, leaving out nothing. His listener watched him while he spoke with that keenness which goes with the making of bricks without straw.

Then spake Mr Angmering, laying his fat hand upon the jewel-case: 'It's no go, old man. You've got the wrong egg. These are Mrs Angmering's *paste jewels*. The real ones were in the two larger cases.' He paused, and Harvey-Dottrell's face became slowly the face of an old man. 'But'—he never took his eyes off his companion—'I'll give you fifty pounds for salvaging these, and another fifty for putting out the fire.'

And Harvey-Dottrell breathed a great breath, as a drowning man breathes who catches hold of a broken spar.

Some six months later Harvey-Dottrell, who had been shooting wild-fowl on the estuary, was walking back along that same island, towards dusk, to Cocklesea, to catch the train

home. He was thinking to himself that one hundred pounds would not last for ever, even with his small earnings, and his thoughts were of a gloomy kind. A cab passed him at the usual 'cab-trot,' the only sign of life on the long, cold, wet road. A sea-fog was swirling inland past him.

Quite absent-mindedly, he glanced up at the occupant of the cab. He saw a little old man with remarkably bright, alert eyes, muffled up in a shabby coat, and instantly he was conscious of having seen that face before, without being able to remember where.

The little old man peered at him, jumped, and shouted, and the cab stopped. 'Be you the bloke with th' stuff for drivin' off flies?' he called excitedly to Harvey-Dottrell, thrusting his head out of the window. And Harvey-Dottrell allowed that he was. 'Then 'op inside. I've bin up and down this bloomin' old road 'bout once a week for the last six months pretty well, a-untin' for ye. Now I've found ye.—Drive on, cabby,' he cried.

Harvey-Dottrell, too much surprised to speak, sank back on the seat beside the old man, thumping his head with his knuckles, trying to remember where he had seen that face and heard that voice before. He could not remember.

The old man leant back and looked at him in silence. His cunning little eyes shone mischievously in the cold dusk like a rat's. He pulled up his trousers at the knee, and regarded his horny hands with a chuckle. The chuckle was like the gibbering of a very old and knowing rat. Then he spoke. 'Don't know me?' he queried.

'Not from Adam,' Harvey-Dottrell owned.

And the old man chuckled more malevolently than ever. 'D'you remember th' old gaffer as ye 'elped when 'e give out that day as th' fly plague came to Cocklesea? Th' old feller as sold oranges?' he asked.

And Harvey-Dottrell jumped. 'Of course I do. You—you're he,' he almost shouted.

'I am that,' was the answer, and the eyes gleamed at him through cigar-smoke till they seemed almost to burn.

'My dear life!' Harvey-Dottrell stared at him. 'But you've gone up in the world?'

'I 'ave that.'

'How?'

'By a-followin' *you*.'

'*Me*? How the devil'——

'Yus, a-followin' of you. It was I as took the jewel-cases; but those darn revolver-bullets, they came main close.'

And Harvey-Dottrell was dumb. He saw it

all now—his foolishness in saying that he was going to fetch something (obviously valuables) for a lady ; the fact that he had never looked back ; the creak in the kitchen, and the sound later as of some one stumbling against a chair ; the mysterious disappearance of the two biggest jewel-cases while he and the men were in the bedroom, and the wild shouting of the two men over the banisters—all now became clear. The old renegade ! ‘D’you know, you’ve lost me, my wife, and my four little children five hundred pounds?’ he asked at last, angrily.

‘Oh ! oh ho ! Five ‘undred, was it, old Mother Angmering offered ye ? Well, I ain’t lost ye nawthin’, me lad. Listen, now.’ The old man paused, and for a long half-minute there was that silence which comes when a rodent is disturbed at its work, and is thinking how to act. Then he spoke. ‘I got them jewels, an’ I wrote to t’ old man Angmering a-tellin’ ‘im as I knawed ~~wur~~ they be, an’ askin’ what ‘e’d pay me. ‘E wrote back an’ sez five ‘undred poun’. I writes back again, an’ I sez my terms was two thousand poun’ an’ silence. ‘E agreed. ‘E ‘ad to, an’ ‘e got ‘is jewels. An’ them two gents as come for t’ steal t’ jewels, they was two as got the sack from th’ Government Department for stealin’ without reportin’ yourn an’ other blokes’ inventions. I ‘ad that from th’

copper arterwards. They an' their flies! Poof! It was their game, just t' frighten folks an' get at old Mother Angmering's jewels. I don't believe as any o' them flies 'ad plague at all—at all.'

'Good Lord!' moaned Harvey-Dottrell. 'But you've got a head!'

'I 'ave. Not like yourn, though. Yourn's full o' uncommon-sense, and mine, 'e's full o' common-sense. I ain't a thief, quite, no more 'n you be, but they do say as there be honour among thieves even. What 'ave I bin a-tryin' t' find ye all this time fer? This, Mister—what's yer name?'

'Harvey-Dottrell.'

'Right, Mister 'Arvey-Dottrell—*this*.' And, so saying, he drew from the depths of his rusty old coat a cheque. Then, with a considerable amount of important puffing, he read it over, spelling each word with silent-moving lips carefully, as the illiterate do, and handed it to Harvey-Dottrell. 'The 'alf,' he said simply.

Harvey-Dottrell took it, looked, and gave one long whistle. The cheque was signed by Angmering himself, was for one thousand pounds, and the name space indicating to whom it was made out was left blank. 'Oh!' he cried. 'Oh, thank God! Thank you. Thank'—

But words failed him, and he sat staring at it with moist eyes.

The old man laid his hand gently upon Harvey-Dottrell's shoulder. 'Don't take on, me lad,' he muttered huskily. 'Ye're worth it, an'—an' so'm I.'

And he leant back chuckling, as the first of the station lights shone upon his little, beady, cunning, sharp eyes, burning in the depth of the cab's gloom. They looked more like the eyes of a rat than ever.

SHADOWS.

RACTON got out of the '5.39 down,' as he had done every afternoon except Saturdays, Sundays, Bank Holidays, and summer holidays for seven years. He carried a bunch of flowers in his hand, and a small basket of fruit—such things as a man buys (for good or evil) outside a large London terminus—little offerings to his wife, as he had done any day, and nearly every day, all through those years. He rarely forgot. He walked up the short hill leading from the quiet station with his little shambling walk, a quiet, clean-shaven man, quietly dressed, a little flabby, a little weak both ways, but a 'sticker'—and we all know what a 'sticker' means—for all that.

He let himself in at the polished front-door of his little house, which was not far from the station, surveying his little front-garden the while, and seeing that it was good—as he had done any day these many years.

He walked across the hall, hung up his hat, put his bag on a strictly correct, hard hall-chair never meant to be sat upon—as he had done almost every day.

And the dining-room was empty—empty of

all save the company of a little brass kettle on a little, natty brass gas-ring—as it had often been empty any time these many years, for Racton's wife frequently was out shopping, or seeing friends, or—oh, anyway, out.

But Racton, though he was used to it, had never got over a horrible empty feeling in the pit of his stomach, a sort of dread—nameless 'tis true, foolish undoubtedly, but still a vague dread—when he had found the room thus empty on many days these several years. Perhaps it was kismet, tipping him in advance. Some men get warnings in that way, maybe.

Racton laid his offerings upon the table, made and poured himself out a cup of tea, and had eaten half-a-dozen mustard-and-cress sandwiches—he grew the mustard and cress all the year round in the attic—before he discovered a note for him lying conspicuously upon the table.

He was an absent-minded man, much pre-occupied with his own thoughts usually, and he opened the letter in an absent-minded way. He read perhaps half through the letter before he realised what he was reading. Then he stopped chewing his mustard-and-cress sandwich, and his mouth fell open. It remained open while he finished the letter—it was not a long one—and while he re-read it twice.

Then he stumbled, rather than walked, to the fireplace, and stood there with his head dropped—like the head of a beaten dog—staring at the coals—as he had *not* done once during all those years.

Up to that point everything had been in order, regular, and as usual. From that point everything was new.

He held the letter crushed in his clenched right hand, the letter from his wife, who was his wife no longer, but the beloved of another man—the letter said so, like a bombshell, all in a second, in a few bald words. And she could never be his wife again—never. However much they two might wish it, they could never be as they had been. The house of cards had fallen, and they could never rebuild it even if they prayed till ninety times ninety—he was that sort of man, fashioned that way by the good God, and he knew it. But he knew, too, how to long.

And in that hour Racton died, and—a new Racton was born. But perhaps the new Racton had been there all the time, waiting for the steel to strike the spark out of the flint. It is the same with many men, I guess, though most go to their Maker without the flint ever being struck.

The servant noticed it directly Racton turned

to speak when she came into the room ('No, he did not wish to give her and cook notice. They would please carry on just as usual.') Men at the office noticed it next day, and coming to get the better of an easy-going Racton in a deal—he was an estate agent—went away dumb, or with their tails between their legs, so to say. Dear, kind relations, rushing in with their mouths open to offer the sympathies they assuredly never felt, got stuck half-way, and retired disconcerted, leaving much unsaid that they had meant to say.

As for Racton himself, he said nothing. He worked. My, how that man worked!—worked at anything and everything that he could lay his hands to that would make money—worked night and day, worked to kill himself with work, and only succeeded in growing stronger. At the beginning, upon the day of the coming of his trouble, his bank-book showed that he had £5 in the bank, and his account-books that he had some £30 owing to him. Upon a day three years later his bank-book showed that he had over £1000 in the bank, and some £500 coming to him. During that time he had launched into journalism in his non-office hours.

Upon the day when he had come home to find his wife gone, he had turned when the servant left the room, and going to his wife's

room, examined everything swiftly. His wife was a careless, untidy person, one of those lolloping, walloping women that no man can understand, but a few go crazy over and do mad things for ; she might have been Roman, if she hadn't been Saxon.

Apparently she had left in a hurry, this wife of Racton's—unable to make up her mind till the last moment, and then acting in a fit of 'madness.' She had complained in her letter, left behind, that it was so quiet at home ; that Racton was always at work ; and that she wanted some Life (she spelt it with a small 'l,' but intended it with a capital). Her room showed the woman. Compton's letters to her—Racton knew Compton, and knew nothing good of him, and he had suspected him from the first—were lying open in a drawer ; jewellery was about ; everything was about, including some deeds belonging to his wife which Racton had made over to her upon their marriage. He could not take them back, and they were worth a little—say £100 or so.

'And he'll come for these,' muttered Racton to himself, holding the deeds in his hand. 'He's always hard up—they'll both be hard up. Sooner or later he'll come, not openly, but as a thief.'

By which it appeared that Racton knew

Compton, suspected him of fearing to face divorce proceedings or Racton's revengeful nature, and yet would in the end be driven to take the risk of a thief. Racton was quite well aware that his wife would fear his violence upon Compton if she wrote for the deeds, and neither of them dared call for them. A third party was out of the question with Racton.

'He'll come,' said Racton, and his face was the face of a granite statue. 'Perhaps at once, perhaps in years; but he'll come, and I can wait.'

He did wait. He went to his study, pulled out a leather case from under some books, took therefrom the stock of a 12-bore gun, then a pair of laminated steel 12-bore barrels, fitted barrels to stock, fitted fore-end to barrels, placed two 12-bore cartridges in the chambers, put the safety-catch at 'safe,' and hung the gun up where he could at all times most easily get it.

'I can wait,' he had said, and he kept his word. He waited three years, by which time, since he had never by word or deed altered his daily life, people began to think that he had forgotten. Howard Racton forget!

'And the shadows come and go, old man; and the shadows come and go,' a girl had said to him lately, a girl who had known him in the

old days and in the old life, before he had given up all his prospects and been disinherited—to marry his wife.

And he had nodded, only nodded, and said, 'Yes.' That was all; but no man, or woman either, knew what was in his soul. Here was no longer a little or flabby Racton, but a man of power, with an exterior of flint. People did not deal with him lightly, as a rule, or get much change out of him if they did. He made no friends, only acquaintances, and those said that it was like talking to a sphinx.

It was on a quiet, warm, still morning that Compton came, not quite as Racton had expected him to come; but he came—after three years, and Racton had spent every hour of that time, whenever he was at home, waiting for Compton, waiting for him with his gun ready.

The deeds he placed in his desk. He knew his wife would guess that, and would tell Compton. And his desk was generally open. His wife knew that quite well.

A gentle, subdued rain-shower had fallen, and the quiet streets of the sleepy town were very still, for a big local *fête* was taking place, and all the world and his wife and his children were at it. Racton was expected to be at it. He had given the servants a holiday to be at

it. Racton had, indeed, left home to go to it, but had returned, after half-an-hour, to fetch a rain-coat.

And he was standing in his study, within reach of his gun—in his study, all alone in the empty house, looking out of the open French window on to the lawn. And Compton came stalking from the tradesmen's entrance, softly, silently, across the lawn, and was standing framed in the French window with the furtive sun behind him, his face in silhouette—like the face of a Roman emperor it was, close-shaven, swarthy, and selfish, clean-cut like a cameo—before he became aware of Racton, erect and motionless, there in the middle of the shaded room.

Then he started and was still.

The silence that followed was tense and strained almost beyond endurance. Only the little clock broke it, the little clock on the mantelpiece, ticking hurriedly, as if anxious to get so awkward a period of time over. But the actual period cannot have been more than seconds, though it seemed minutes.

Plainly Compton was surprised to see Racton, had not expected him to be there at all, having watched him out of the house some time before. He seemed to feel keenly the need for explanation—like a man who finds

himself suddenly up against it without meaning to be.

‘May I come in?’ he asked after a bit, in a voice that had become suddenly high; but he cannot have meant the commonplace that he spoke, for he had stepped inside before the words were out of his lips.

‘Look here, Racton,’ he began, in that customary half-argumentative, half-bullying tone that was his, ‘you’ve got to’——

But there he stopped, for his eyes had now become accustomed to the change of light from sub-glare to shaded room, had focussed, and—he realised for the first time two facts at once. The first was that Racton was holding in his hand something strangely sinister which gave off a bar-like gleam. The second was that this still, cold, erect man in front of him was not the self-conscious, slightly deprecating, apparently weak Racton he had known. There was a change somewhere, almost like a mistake for which he felt inclined to blame Racton, a subtle difference that met him like a piece of metal.

But life is very dear to such men as Max Compton—which, by the way, does not explain why they usually make such a bungle of it. Danger was to him worse than a blow.

‘I say! Steady, Racton! Steady, old man! What are you doing with that thing?’

Dawning horror and realisation were playing across his 'classic' features in swift, horrible waves; his face had suddenly become unnice to look upon. He was the colour of putty, then a sickly gray. His eyes drew themselves together till it seemed as if they must join and fly out of his head at Racton. The vertical lines above his brows became knotted. He seemed suddenly about to be choking. He struggled wildly, visibly, without moving, with himself; was throttling slowly with a frantic, a wild, an awful desire to say something, but could not get it out. The words would not come; they stuck in his throat, they prevented breathing, and he gripped at his throat with his hands, but the hand that was throttling back his words was the hand of Fear. Yet he must speak—must. If only he spoke he would not die. If only he could say what he had got to, everything would be all right. But he could not; Fear had got him—dumb. And the seconds passed somehow, the slow, dragging seconds that were precious to him beyond gold in that moment. In a very few moments it would be too late, too late, if he did not say what he had to say, but couldn't say because of Fear.

And as he watched, fighting awfully with himself like a man visibly possessed of devils;

as he stood there and watched Racton slowly raise his double-barrelled gun to his shoulder; stood there and gazed, like a fascinated rabbit, into the twin black circular cavities of the muzzle, the years seemed to fall from him, and he became once again a little boy—a petulant, spoilt, teaseful little boy. The bullying, blustering manner had gone, slidden from him with the rest, leaving only the real Compton—the little spoilt boy, wild and speechless with terror.

Racton's face was as impassive as a stone carving, and as hard; also with as much expression. His suffering had been spread over three years; he could not suffer or feel more than he had. Compton, on the other hand, was getting all his suffering in one lump—concentrated into seconds.

Slowly—horribly, ghastlily slowly—Racton's knuckles on his right hand whitened to ivory, especially the first one.

'I knew you would come,' he stated at last, clearly, emotionlessly, levelly. 'But you have kept me waiting a long time.'

Then he pulled the trigger of the right barrel. He had waited three years to do that very thing.

Compton made a sort of whistling sound in his throat, but he did not move; nor did Racton.

There was the sound of the clock ticking and of the hammer falling, and—that was all. There was no flash, no report, nothing—only the clean, sharp smack of the falling hammer.

‘Never mind,’ said Racton coolly. ‘There is the left barrel. That is the beauty of having two.’ He had never moved, never altered his expression.

Compton was making noises; he was about to speak; he was speaking; words came to him. ‘But—but’—— he sputtered, and—Racton pulled the second trigger, the trigger of the left barrel.

Compton fell back into a chair, his hands over his face.

Racton lowered his gun. His face was like a carving, but he was staring at the gun, for again there had been no waited-for thunderous report, only the clean, hard tap of the hammer falling.

‘My God, Racton, what d’you — what d’you want to kill me for?’ burst out Compton at last.

‘Miss fire, apparently—and both barrels, too! You should know, if any man should. No, by Jove! Look!’ Racton had opened the gun as he spoke, and now showed it to Compton.

The gun was empty.

'What the'—— Compton began, and stopped with an odd laugh; there was no mirth in the laugh.

'Took the cartridges out when I went to the *fête*, and must have forgotten to put them in again,' replied Racton. 'Never mind. I can remedy the omission.' And then, as an afterthought, 'You should know why I have waited for you.'

Compton suddenly leapt up in his chair.

'Oh, you fool! Not Mrs—not Winnie—your wife? You don't think—— Heavens, man, I haven't seen her since the day she ran away from you, when she met me, *and left me*, at the railway station. I thought you knew.'

Racton stopped in his task of taking cartridges from a drawer in his desk. His back was turned. His hand in the drawer ceased to move.

The little clock on the mantelpiece ticked ten times like mad.

Then Racton turned slowly round. 'Why?' he asked, slowly and between his teeth, his cold, stony eyes fixed squarely upon Compton's prominent ones.

And Compton shrugged his shoulders. 'God knows,' he said. 'Seemed to have a

sudden reaction against me, changed her mind, or something. Said I looked shabby and untidy and dirty, and she'd made a mistake—a silly, mad mistake. No accounting for women. They're all alike.'

And Racton smiled, a slow shadow of a smile, that played about the corners of his mouth for a moment, and was gone. 'Where did she go? Why didn't she write to me?' he snapped out harshly, and so curtly that Compton, who was just beginning to get back to man's ways again, jumped.

'Went to her married sister, I believe. I told her to write to you, and she said it would be no use; you'd never believe or forgive.'

'No more I should,' came the prompt reply.

Compton began to look more like a boy again, and eyed the gun. 'Um!' said he.

'Eh?'

'Nothing.'

'Look here, Compton; even if I believed you, what did you come here for now, anyway?' Racton asked, his eyes cold and hard as ever, his face black.

'Your wife wrote and asked me to get her deeds, and, like a fool, I took this way.'

'Why?'

‘We didn’t know what you’d do. I feared you wouldn’t believe me, especially as I was getting ’em for her. But you do, don’t you? Send ’em yourself. We never even saw each other out of your sight, you know. It was all a silly, mad idea, made on the spur of the moment. If you were a different sort of man, you’d understand.’

‘I don’t, and I’m glad I’m not,’ was Racton’s uncompromising answer.

‘And you really mean to kill me, and be a murderer?’ went on Compton. ‘Were there ever cartridges in that gun?’

And for answer Racton held up for him to see two cartridges with the oil from the chambers of the gun still upon them. It seemed enough answer truly, but Racton never actually said; and no one has ever found out whether he really knew that there were no cartridges in the gun when he aimed it at Compton’s head, or whether he did not know. Even his wife never knew, but she knew she was very happy to get back to him, and—she seemed to think much more of the new Racton than she ever had of the old—which only shows. W-e-l-l—the shadows come and go, my friends; the shadows come and go

BREAD AND BUTTER.

THE car that had passed him once came back again, and swung, turned round, and stopped—pulsating and waiting. A man got out and came back, and even in the cheating moonlight Ravenhurst could see that, in spite of his clothes, he looked a plug ugly one.

‘You picked that up,’ said the man, pointing at ‘Monty’ Ravenhurst’s attaché-case, and Monty stopped. He had not picked it up. It was his. He had been using it more or less all day at the little local estate office he ran, and was returning home to tea-dinner.

‘Pardon me, I did nothing of the kind. It’s mine. Have you lost one?’ He spoke very quietly, with rather a drawl, and there was nothing at all to provoke a quarrel in his tone. Yet it seemed to make the man mad.

‘Give it up, sharp,’ was the answer, and the man came a step nearer.

Monty’s face flushed. He was the wrong sort to deal with in that way, and a look came into his eyes that any but a fool might have read.

‘I’ve already told you,’ he answered, even more politely than ever, and that alone was a warning note—with him.

But the man gave no reply to that; he rushed Ravenhurst.

The result was curious; also, it was unexpected. Monty did not look like the sort of man to produce it, till you had heard him give his views upon science *versus* strength—then he did.

Monty’s right hand shot out, open, and stopped the man’s chin. In some way the man’s right-hand blow fell off Monty’s arm. It was all as quick as lightning, and hard to follow. There was a shuffling of feet, and—the man was on his back, using language to match.

But to do this Monty had had to put down his attaché-case, and he now quickly stooped to pick it up again. Peering in the moonlight, he could not see it for a moment, but the next moment he did. It was in the hands of a second man, who was running back towards the car. This individual had evidently got out of the car on the side away from him, and short-circuited him neatly.

It was at this moment that the individual on the ground left off swearing, and got up rather suddenly. He was being given one of

the rare opportunities that people got of realising that, when he chose, Monty Ravenhurst could sprint, and the view he got did not seem to please him.

Monty caught up the man who was making off with his attaché-case almost before the latter realised what was happening, gripped him by the chin, wrenched him over backwards, snatched up the case, and was gone over the nearest gate, and away across a field at a pace that did not look like his being overtaken.

Neither, however, seemed willing to overtake him, but they had something else that could. Both of the men from the car arrived, breathless and cursing, at the gate together. Followed an unmistakable bar-like gleam in the moonlight, a flicker of flame, and a short, sharp, smacking report through the night silence.

Monty heard it as he ran. He heard, also, the peculiarly triumphant little song at being released which a bullet makes go past his head, and not being a candidate for the next world—he had a wife and children—he promptly dropped the attaché-case as he ran, but he did not stop running.

From behind the next hedge he watched one of the men race out, recover the said case, and race back to the car again. Then the car droned away into the night, and Monty was

left alone with the bats and one cow, who stared with deep suspicion.

‘Confound it!’ muttered the despoiled one. ‘I shall have to go back to the office for some more writing-paper, and—and they’ve taken my only stylo;’ and he scratched his head slowly as he retraced his steps to the road.

Now, there had been nothing in Monty Ravenhurst’s attaché-case to kick up all that fuss about—simply nothing at all. The sole contents consisted of some writing-paper and envelopes, Monty’s cheque-book—too full of counterfoils—a cheap stylographic pen, two or three trade letters which he was taking home to answer, and a few bills, also too many—for him. Therefore Monty scratched his head slowly as he went back down the road to his little office—it was only a quarter of a mile away—and continued to scratch it till he—kicked and nearly fell over something lying in the road, in the darkness under some trees.

He stooped and picked it up, and examined it in a bar of moonlight. It was an attaché-case, almost exactly like his own, except that it was a little less worn, and of better quality. And it was at this point that an owl, that had been sitting in the trees overhead, fled suddenly at the sound of his laughter.

Apparently, so far as he could put two and

two together, the occupants of that motor-car had dropped an attaché-case upon which they set peculiar value. Discovering the fact, they had returned to search for it, and the two young searchlights which the car carried by way of lamps revealing Monty walking along with what appeared to be their attaché-case, they had jumped at a conclusion. Certainly they had a very strange way of jumping at a conclusion; but, as Monty Ravenhurst said to his wife, as he sat down to tea in his little bungalow rather over half-an-hour later, 'That doesn't make any difference. If they want their precious case without having to answer some awkward questions from the police about it, they'll have to pay me fifty pounds for it, that's all.'

But that was not all.

It was Eve who, messing about promiscuously with Monty's keys while Monty consumed, discovered that the key of Monty's attaché-case opened also the stranger case. She opened the case, and announced her discovery afterwards.

But it was Adam who came and looked on—weakly, purposely weakly, protesting—while she examined the contents of said case. After all, it *was* fair game, seeing that the owners of that case had apparently forgotten

all the manners they had (or had not) ever learnt.

But the contents of the case were startling enough, in all conscience, to put other considerations aside. There was a map, and the map was of a certain part of Scotland attended by many islands. There was another map, on larger scale, of one of these islands, marked 'uninhabited,' and having a red X in a certain inlet of that island. Finally, there was a third map, on the largest scale of all, and evidently 'home-made,' of that marked inlet on that island, showing position of ledges, rocks, sand, and, in the sand—this is where Ravenhurst said, 'Gee!'—'position of wreck of galleon,' and supplemented by a date. Also there was a letter, or, rather, note, saying :

'DEAR S.,—Enclosed I send maps, which should easily lead to the partially buried galleon. If we aren't rich men when we've done with it, ask me. Keep shy.—Yours, T.'

Now that, you will concede, was an altogether strange sort of a note, and Ravenhurst read it over twice or thrice, scratching his head between times, before he spoke.

Then, 'Well, I'm blest !' quoth he, and lit a cigarette.

Monty Ravenhurst, it may be mentioned,

with a wife and children, was struggling upward. At least, he bluffed himself that way. But up to date there had been plenty of struggle, and mighty little upward. However—there was always to-morrow. And Monty was an enterprising young man; no mildew grew upon him, and he believed that ‘man can do what hath by man been done.’ Wherefore we may assume that never did report of Spanish treasure-galleon fall upon more fertile ground. Still, ‘It isn’t a one-man job, anyway,’ he said, and sat thinking.

His wife said nothing. She was fat, and she was not ambitious. Happiness in a cottage would do for her. Also, she knew Monty, and guessed that he’d do the worrying for two; besides which, she had really, at the back of her heart, a very loyal confidence in her husband.

The end of that cigarette heard the front-door bang on Monty’s back. He removed himself to the residence of Silas P. Conch, distant one quarter of a mile. Silas P. Conch was ambitious too. He was growing herbs to prove it. But Silas P. Conch had already collected some money, which only whetted his appetite for more. It seemed, therefore, evident that Silas P. Conch was the man to ‘consult’—Monty called it ‘consult’ because

he knew Conch—in such a case. Monty Ravenhurst told Conch everything, just precisely as it happened, and ended up with the production of the maps, and the note, and the attaché-case.

And Silas P. Conch laughed. ‘And what d’ you want?’ asked he.

‘A steam-launch, so as not to be dependent upon the fishermen of the mainland to take us to the island. They’d only smell a rat, and perhaps start looking for themselves.’

‘And who’s us?’

‘Three men I can trust, and you and I.’

‘Um!’ Silas P. Conch regarded his nose for a space; then, ‘That depends upon who’s the owner of these pretty things.’ He waved a large herb-stained hand over the attaché-case, &c. ‘We must go by the law, if only for the reason that it sha’n’t go for us. Wait three days and see; but trace a copy of these maps, and give it to me, and place one also in the bank. You never know.’

Monty didn’t know, but he had sense enough to do what he was told, and at the end of the three days—the original attaché-case, note, maps, and all vanished out of his house in the night. They vanished like smoke, leaving neither sign nor sound to show whither they went.

Silas P. Conch, however, was not concerned. He only smiled. 'I expected it,' he stated, 'from the manner those fellers asked for your attaché-case. It wasn't the way of law-abiding citizens, galleon or no galleon. For very good reasons they seem to have, those gentlemen showed then, and have shown again now, that they don't want to appear in public. They're probably "crooks." Very likely they stole the maps in the first place, and are "wanted regarding them." Probably they are "wanted," anyway. Now we'll get to work. And let me tell you it's a race. Also, it's no race to run in mittens. We go collecting rare birds on the Scotch coast, you understand—shooting 'em.'

And they did.

.
There was a sea like broken glass aboil;
there was a sky of fat, hurrying gray mists;
there were piled and tumbling cliffs; heave
upon heave of gaunt wet rock; and above,
below, and on it all a few hundred thousand
sea-birds skirmished upon their lawful
occasions.

This scene Monty Ravenhurst viewed critically as he sat in the stern of the fishing-boat that he had hired to take him from the mainland to Galleon Island—at least, that is what

he called it, though it had another and official name which he never divulged.

Silas P. Conch and the 'three men I can trust' were bringing a launch up from the south—hugging the coast—as fast as she would steam, so that they could visit the island independently of the local fishing fraternity, who otherwise might talk, though you mightn't think it by the dead silence that reigned in the boat, broken only by the 'thut-arump' of the oars in the rowlocks. Monty had been sent on overland by train to get to the island and camp there as best he could before the others arrived.

So far as it was possible to drag anything out of them, the flash of silver—and other things—had produced from the fishermen of the mainland fishing-village the fact that the gentry of the motor-car had not, so far, turned up to visit the island, so Monty would be first on the ground, anyway. From what he saw of it he devoutly hoped that he would not also be the last; for, so far as he could make out, the place would be divided between himself, the sea-birds, and the rabbits; but he found other inhabitants—not human—there later.

At the very calmest summer periods you can—if you are sufficiently well insured—land upon islands of that kind—there are plenty of

them in those parts—upon almost as many days as you cannot. The rest of the year you cannot, anyway.

Monty Ravenhurst landed 'anyway' too, flung starfish fashion upon a wet rock, which was meant to represent a neat jump when the men in the tossing boat beside the jumbled rocks said, 'Now.' His kit—he told 'em he was going to photograph sea-birds—his tinned foods, his wine—but they told him he would find a good little stream, and he did—his camera and photographic plates, his hut—a tent was out of the question in that tournament-ground of the winds—and all the things that were his, were put, or thrown, ashore, more or less dry, after him.

Thereafter two of the fishermen helped him to get straight—which was very crooked indeed—while the other two stood off in the boat, and the four finally set out on their journey back to the mainland, and left him alone.

But he did not realise quite what that last meant, till the boat had melted to about the size of a cuff-link. Then he did, and it made him gasp. He felt as if he were suddenly quite empty inside, and the sea-birds that swept around and screamed curses at him only made things worse. He had read about being

utterly alone in the wilderness, but the real thing was ten times worse than any printed description.

For one thing, he had come out of summer to a land where a mild November was about as near as they ever get to summer. For another thing, he had come out of sunshiny days and lamp-lit nights to a place where there are neither nights nor days worth speaking of, but only a deeper and a lighter dusk. And for another thing, there was no living thing in all earth or sea or sky to help him in distress, to know or care whether he lived or died, except the hostile birds, and they didn't care at all.

Ere long Monty set out to find, by aid of his traced map, the little cove marked with an X on the map, wherein, buried in sand, the map said, the treasure-galleon was supposed to be. Before doing so he took from a waterproof case, that made out it enclosed a camera, the butt part of a little rifle; the case that should have enclosed the legs of the camera produced the barrel part of the same; and the whole, fitted together, made an automatic .22-calibre rifle. Naturally, after that, his case of photographic plates became only boxes of ammunition.

Thus armed, and with a Burberry coat to

keep off the rain-showers that blotted out the landscape from time to time, and with top-boots interlined with rubber to laugh at the wet from the heather, that often came to his waist, he made his way.

Under the heather he surprised big brown eider-ducks at their housekeeping; on an open space he invaded the camping-ground of smoky-hued, fierce-eyed, clipper-built skua gulls, which came at him at top speed, beak first, and seemed likely to knock his soft tweed hat off. And everywhere he had to walk circumspectly because of the burrows of puffins, whose rainbow-hued beaks made mouths at him on every hand. There were thousands of puffins.

Three coal-black ravens sat upon rocks, and cursed him with unseemly croakings; and, as if that were not omen enough, a gray crow of obviously wild character flapped after him for much of the way, like an attendant evil spirit.

At the end of two miles he stopped very suddenly on the top of what appeared to be a beautiful little upward slope of smooth turf dotted with sea-pinks. There was reason for the suddenness of his stop, because a bird on still wings floated upwards from apparently under his feet as silently as a white ghost,

which bird was a fulmar petrel; and the upward slope of ground *had no other side to it*. At least, the other side was the flying foam of the breakers, hundreds of feet below, and sea-birds floating in space like black and white and silver dots.

Monty Ravenhurst did not gaze into the nothing that he had all but launched himself into many more seconds than was necessary to learn that the cliff-edge upon that island mostly flared upwards in smooth, enticing stretches of turf. He quickly backed away to search for the fold in the cliff which the map said led down to the sandy inlet that held the galleon.

He found the fold finally—you would never have guessed it was there—and in a blinding rain-shower descended, feet first, on hands and knees, or sliding avalanchingly, not gracefully or comfortably, but without actually breaking his neck or a limb, to the bottom. By the time he had finished, he was neither so clean nor so dry as he had been when he started. Also, he had begun to imbibe a very lively respect for the cliffs and rocks and slopes of that island, and for the motto that implores one to look before one leaps.

‘It must have been coined here, I guess,’ commented Monty out loud, picking himself

up, and brushing his clothes—and straightway jumped round as if something had hurt him as there came a plunge and a crash of water behind like a gun-shot.

He found himself staring at a sandy-shored, nearly landlocked cove, shut in by towering precipices of dark-gray rock. In one place the water was still boiling, where a very much astonished seal had removed from his afternoon siesta on a slab of rock into the green depths, and in another place a second seal was just taking a superb 'header.' It was only the noise the first had made upon hitting the water that had startled Monty, for in that wet, eerie, echoing place any noise was calculated to startle any one.

Monty had no more than made quite sure that the seals meant no harm—at least, not while he stood on dry land—when a thunderous uproar above set him running out and away upon the sand, as if the cliff itself had broken loose and was sliding down bodily upon him.

When far enough out, as he judged, not to be immediately overwhelmed and buried for ever past all finding, he turned, and, looking up, discovered that the sound was coming from the mouth of a cavern high overhead—there were many such around the cove—out of which clouds of rock-doves were

pouring, and it was the roar of their wings as they rose, startled at his sudden, and, no doubt, strange, appearance on the beach of that, their cove—which, for all Monty knew, had never before but twice, when the galleon foundered, and when she was rediscovered, been visited by man—that had frightened him.

Apparently the fishermen of the mainland did not know of this cove. If they had, they would never have chosen to land upon the abominable rocks where they did. But there was nothing surprising in that. The cove was nearly land-locked, and hidden from the sea, and the natives of those parts knew better than to play about too near the cliff-tops. The thing would remain hidden from them, therefore.

By the aid of his sketch-map, Monty Ravenhurst soon found the site of the supposed treasure-galleon's grave. Indeed, his eye turned to it at once, for some one, some time ago—and he was, no doubt, the discoverer of it—had been digging there, so that quite a little heap still remained, in spite of the drifting, beautiful white sand, which here appeared to be entirely above even storm high-water mark.

Monty Ravenhurst had a little spade with him—one end was a pickaxe—such as soldiers

use for entrenching. He had no intention of digging anything that would show that he had been there, but he struck down, almost at random, for a few spadefuls, and almost jumped out of the hole when his tool struck upon wood. Feverish further examination—not helped by the sweat that poured down his face, for all that it was really cold, and the rain beat in upon him—revealed timber, solid, old, and sea-worn. It was big, for he could not anywhere get past it, and it looked like the planking of a ship's upper deck. Monty sat down and mopped his face. He was conscious of being very thankful that he had told his friends to bring blasting-powder. Also, he was highly excited, and his hand trembled as he lit a cigarette.

The thing was true. He had more than half expected that it was not. At least, here undoubtedly was a buried ship. But what ship? Who knew what lay inside of her—what wealth, or poverty truly, since the one seemed to him still as likely as the other? And what would not wealth mean to him?

Monty removed after that. He noted that great caves opened here and there on the face of the black precipices that surrounded the cove, but there appeared to be no possible

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way of getting up to them. They would be preferable to his hut o' nights. He did not relish staying up there, alone in the wind and the rain; and an awful loneliness was again beginning to seize upon him.

Then chance came and showed him the path to a cave. He fired, half angry at his own homesick feelings, at a great herring-gull which had suddenly come flying over at that moment, and dropped both it and a poor little baby puffin it was carrying upon a great jagged boulder lying at the foot of the cliff not far away. Shot gull and smashed puffin fell out of sight behind the big boulder, and in going to examine them, Monty Ravenhurst discovered a way, though a hidden one, up to one of the caves, and this he promptly explored. The exploration produced two things—one cave facing into the cove, and another, connected with the first by a passage, facing out to sea. There were other passages too, and other caves, presumably at one time hollowed out by the sea. At any rate, he could distinctly hear bombarding, and choking, and roaring, and pounding, and gurgling horribly far down in the bowels of the earth, it seemed; but he did not wait to inquire further. He hurried away to transfer his kit from the hut to the cave, where he could keep an eye upon

his galleon—he called it his—and at the same time not be blown bodily into the sea, which, it seemed, he stood a very good chance of if he tried to ride out only one night in that rickety wooden box on the top of the ‘ness,’ on this island of all the winds.

A man normally brought up to nights in bed, with nothing more alarming than the frenzied arguments of cats or the southing of the breeze among trees to disturb him, that night, for Monty Ravenhurst, was awful. The only bright spot in it was that he was not in the hut. If he had been, he felt quite sure that he wouldn’t have been—that, in fact, the hut would have been gone, high and sailingly, without, or possibly with, him into the night.

Never in all his life had Monty known such wind as blew there that night, and that was in summer, too. Heaven knew what hurricanes winter produced! It seemed like a solid thing, and alive, that charged along, howling and gnashing and rooting up everything, like a mammoth prehistoric pig. It seemed to be picking up the island, literally, in chunks, and hurling it into the sea. And between the wind-rushes came the rain, in solid-walled sheets. But the marvel, the lasting marvel, was that the sea never took any notice of

all the inferno, and, although never at any time what we call smooth, remained rolling in as gigantically placidly as before.

Monty explored his surroundings as soon as the red dawn was over, and the black-and-green cormorants and shags, and the black-and-white puffins and razorbills and guillemots, and the pearl-gray and white gulls, and the storm-cloud-coloured skuas had gone out to sea to do their fishing, or, as in the last case, to rob others of their fish.

He found that the caves and passages ran in ramifications all over the place, and he could hear the sea going still farther than, even with his 'Fire Bug' electric torch, he cared to look. For the rest, he kept a sharp eye out to sea, and examined the position of the wrecked galleon more closely, brushing over his footprints carefully in the sand, for he had an impression—the three ravens and the ghoul crow of yesterday were bad omens, surely!—that something was going to happen. And he was right.

Quite early in the morning, in a burst of sunshine, his powerful telescope-binoculars revealed to him a small recurring burst of spray on the face of the glistening sea, away towards the distant mainland. Such spray the bows of a small boat throw up as the

waves hit her, and very soon Ravenhurst picked up the boat, and later made out in her four men rowing, three more in the stern, and one more in the bows. But he did not wait to see who they might be. He guessed.

Instantly Monty Ravenhurst became all energy. He filled the seven spare magazines he had for his rifle, and put them into one pocket, and one other pocket he filled with boxes of ammunition. He filled his thermos flask with hot cocoa from a little spirit-lamp. He put a flask of brandy into a third pocket, mixed some dry cocoa and sugar in a tin to eat, took biscuits and chocolate, and placed his binoculars in a fourth pocket.

Then he crept up a passage he had that morning discovered, which, partly through puffins, partly through rabbits, partly through rain, partly through natural crumbling, led, if you cared to go down on your hands and knees, up and down under the heather on the 'ness.'

At the mouth of that hole he lay hidden, smoking the last cigarette he was likely to enjoy for a bit. He had no delusions. The men who were approaching in the boat were, two of them, the men of the motor-car. Indeed, who else should come to such a place? And he had already—the memory of that

singing bullet still rankled within him!—had a taste of *their* character.

Monty Ravenhurst knew that the men would be landed where he was landed, for they had as good reasons as he not to disclose the existence of the cove. Thence they would, by the help of the maps, walk over the island and find the cove. Perhaps the fishermen had told them of himself, and they would be on the look-out. He smiled grimly, and wondered if they were going to camp on the island, or come over from the mainland by boat every day—every day, that is, that the sea would let them.

In about an hour—but the excitement of the rising, wheeling birds had warned him before—he saw first their heads, then their shoulders, coming over the ‘ness.’ They were carrying picks and shovels. (He learnt afterwards that they said they were prospecting for coal.) They reached the cliff-edge, and the leading man nearly precipitated himself into oblivion, just as Monty had done, and by that he knew that they had not been there before.

Then, working carefully by map, they hunted about for the hidden fold in the cliff, and, finding it, one after the other descended from view.

Monty Ravenhurst waited until the roaring rush of rock-doves’ wings below told him that

the men had got down. Then he crept to the cliff-edge, and peered over.

Three of the men were grouped round the hole and the heap of sand where the galleon lay. The other he could not see.

Then the three men got to work with pick and shovel, and Monty Ravenhurst bit his lip, wondering what he had better do. He was also wondering where the fourth man was, when a sudden loud and mournful shrieking 'Ow-ow, ow-ow, ow-ow!' away behind him wrenched him round with a jerk.

A big herring-gull was flying up and down above the heather, with short half-strokes of its long, narrow wings, some little distance away. It had shrieked at something, or somebody, not himself, giving the show away. Probably if he had not been quite still it would have shrieked at him. He peered carefully at the heather, and his face changed.

The white, or, rather, pink, human skin shows up very plainly in the wild, and Monty had instantly made out the pink face—although the cap above it was invisible—of a man staring at him from among the heather. Even as he looked, something dark blue and gleaming came up in front of the face, and Monty, who knew what *that* meant, with a gasp rolled over from where he lay, exactly three times, the last

roll taking him behind a boulder, and the sharp, silence-shattering report, and the bullet, which came together from that dark-blue, shining thing in front of the face, arrived exactly between the first and the second roll. The bullet said 'Thopp!' thickly in the soft turf, yards wide of its mark.

Monty Ravenhurst laughed to himself, because he could tell from that that the owner of the face was using a revolver, and he knew that not one man in a thousand who handles a revolver is anything of a shot with the same, even at point-blank range. But Monty Ravenhurst was not pleased, all the same, for this face evidently belonged to the fourth visitor, and Monty had allowed himself to be badly out-scouted. They had sent back a sentinel up the path, it seemed.

Moreover, Monty knew that the sound of that shot would bring the others up quick from the cave below, and his game was to live, not die, and apparently, with the untold wealth of the galleon as a spur, those men were not of a type who cared twopence if he did die.

The rest of that minute Monty Ravenhurst occupied in rolling, scrambling flat, on all-fours, and in swearing, in an endeavour to reach the cover of the heather, while the revolver barked ; the gull, very much shocked, screamed ; and

the bullets bit chips of purple bloom off into the air, or sang songs variously around him.

Once in the heather, Monty wriggled his way along, snake fashion, till he came to one of those tunnelled runways that the rabbits, and possibly other things, had driven everywhere through the heather. Then along this path he hurried as quickly as he could under the circumstances—and it isn't easy with a rifle—on hands and knees, making, as near as he could guess, for the hidden hole that, as he had discovered, gave access to the caves below.

He could hear men shouting, and answering with shouts; he could hear a rustling and highly scandalised eider-duck bring upon her flapping self at least two bullets meant for him; and he could hear the crashings of people beating about through the heather. He was not happy because of these things, and he crawled, horribly muddled, damp with apprehension lest he miss his mark, till, thanks to the careful bearing he had taken of it that morning—Monty Ravenhurst was nothing if not 'slim'—he struck the hole he was seeking, and ducked into it, head first, like a rabbit.

Once inside, he lay and panted, and watched the search go forward. He had not much fear of their finding his hiding-place, and still less fear of their crawling down after him if they thought

he was armed, but he shuddered at the thought of their shooting down it. He seemed to hear the thud of the bullet upon his helpless body—for the men were getting very close as they hunted about—crammed into the hole. He remembered having fired down a short rat's burrow at a rat in much the same way some years ago, and the recollection gave him no comfort.

It was raining again, in stinging bursts, and the wind was getting up once more, and this was summer! What a land! Even in his thick coat, with fleece lining, he felt as cold as he would in an English winter.

He was still considering these things, in that swift way that a hunted beast might, when the report of three gun-shots, fired at regular intervals, came to him faintly, borne on the lap of the gale. He knew where they came from, and guessed their import. They were a signal from the fishermen in the boat, and they meant that the sea was getting up, and the four must return to the boat at once, else it would soon be too rough to take them off the island.

The four men came together, and Monty caught, as it were, wisps of shouted conversation, most of it unprintable, from which, and from their conduct, he gathered that they

were probably a gang of criminals. Then they all hurried over the 'ness,' leaving their tools in the cove, just where they had dropped them.

Monty retired to his cave, and had something to eat and drink, and a smoke. He felt that, for that day at least, he was quit of the men, and it was a relief. They were not healthy company. But when he picked up the boat with his glasses a little later, heading, in clouds of spray, for the mainland, he got the shock of his life. There were only four men in her, and those all fishermen! Evidently the sea had risen, as it is apt to do in those parts, more quickly than was expected, and they had had to put off without their passengers, or risk getting the boat smashed to pieces on the rocks if they stayed. Monty Ravenhurst swore softly, and devoutly hoped his co-sharers of the island would stick to their landing-place, and not come bothering him again; but he had not much confidence in his hope.

An hour passed, two, three, and Monty began to feel more comfortable, till suddenly, after some hours, a cloud of birds, rising with screams and sweeping outwards, made him peer out. Then he groaned. Three of the men were scrambling down the track to the cove, dragging after them the sections of his hut.

The fourth was lying flat at the top of the fold in the cliff—on guard.

Thereafter Monty had the pleasure of seeing them erect his hut on the sand below, to leeward of a lump of rock, light a fire, and sit down, eating what provisions they had brought with them. Also, he could see that they partook of other things they had brought with them—things out of bottles! And at sight of this Monty began to suffer from ‘cold feet.’ These men sober were bad enough, but drunk! Even half-drunk, or excited——

Very, very carefully he looked to the sights of his rifle, while the day died, and the wind and the rain squalls chased one another in curtains of haze across the wild, torn, gloomy landscape, and two of the men returned to their digging operations. Outside the cove he could hear the combers bursting against the cliffs with a growing, beast-like, roaring noise; and inside, far down the tunnels, in the bowels of the island, arose an ominous and muffled thunder. He thought of his little, red-bricked bungalow on the outskirts of a sleepy country-town—he would be just about having supper now, in the cosy lamplight—and he cursed the madness that had sent him into the storm-swept wilds of the North, hunting lost galleons or anything else.

So far as he could make out, the men were working in shifts of two at a time—the sentinel on the cliff-top had come down as the light failed—at least, whenever he awoke between dozes, as he sat with his back to the rock wall, he could see, by the fitful light of a wild moon in a torn and racing sky, two figures at the hole where the galleon lay.

And then he couldn't.

Something had awakened him suddenly. It must have been just before dawn, before three in the morning, and that which had awakened him was neither the roar of the wind nor the rage of the sea. It was the click of a falling stone.

In a flash he was on his feet, and peering out of the cave. Then he 'froze' from head to heel—'froze' because, in the gloom, he could make out two blotched human figures standing directly below him, and two creeping stealthily up to the cave. Moreover, plainly, as voices come and go on the lap of strong wind, he heard the voice of a man saying, 'E's in there all right!'

How they knew it Monty did not wait to consider, though, as a matter of fact, driven by storm and lack of room from their small shelter, they had hunted with electric pocket-lamps for a way up to one of the caves, and had happened

upon some of his footprints in soft, brown earth. And they were coming up.

Monty Ravenhurst fired, almost without thinking, at the nearest man, and heard him curse and screw round on the stones, even as the echoed little report of his '22' ran round the cove.

Then from below three tongues of flame licked out, and three sharp revolver-barks sounded nearly together, and three fat bullets came whistling into the cave in a 'covey.'

Thereafter, bending and very cautious, Monty retired down a darksome tunnel, and only noticed that it was down and towards the sea when it was too late.

The men took possession of his cave. He could hear them laughing hollow laughs in the echoing place as they took stock of his kit, but they did not linger over that long. Soon the clear, white beams of electric pocket-lamps began to probe about down his tunnel, and he retired still farther, backing, like a cornered wild cat, round a corner into deeper darkness—and deeper sound, for the suck and the hollow sobbing of the waves in and out of caves below now filled the place.

The pale beams of light came on, and Monty, still backing, smiled. If theirs were ordinary pocket-lamps, and they had no spare batteries,

they would soon fade or give out, if they used them in that continuous fashion. His would last him, at full power, for at least forty-eight hours.

Undoubtedly they were coming on, though to do so seemed unwise, till one realised that their lights must blind his aim if he waited to face them. But he didn't. He retired, still downwards, through damp and slippery places, firing once up into the tunnel, and receiving half-a-dozen bullets—which chipped off stalactites—in return, till he came to an immense wet cavern, full of the thunderous agony of trapped waters.

This place led directly from the open sea outside, and when he turned on his light—he could risk it for a moment or two, the enemy being still far up the tunnel, advancing with that caution which comes of having already faced a good automatic rifle shot—he stopped and stared.

He found himself in a gigantic cavern, whose roof, festooned with jagged, glistening stalactites, ran up into the unknown; whose walls were a blinding welter of streaked, washed colour—lake and reds and greens; and whose floor was a sucking, sobbing, lifting, falling, boiling turmoil of sea. But that was not what held him. It was the inhabitants of the place, the grim, gargoyle-like spirits of the cave, that

for a moment or two, till he recognised them, 'froze' him stiff.

Upon every ledge, upon every boulder, cornice, and fragment, in every crevice, erect and still and grotesque as the devils of Notre Dame, green and metallic, with green reptilian eyes glinting in the electric light, with gapes of brightest gamboge as they yawned at him, sat great, snaky-necked birds—shags and cormorants, in fact—and the air was full, even above the colossal sobbing and choking of the sea, with their uncanny, dungeon-haunted croakings.

Monty Ravenhurst noticed these things and the fact that he could see down, through wonderful shades of green, to the very white, boulder-paved floor of the sea itself, where, for just one brief instant, the beams surprised the tail-part of some huge black monster of the deep. Also, he noticed that day—the faintest possible smudge of dawn—was paling the dusk outside, and that a ledge—wet and slippery, 'tis true, but still a ledge—ran, just above the lift and toss of the cornered waves, away back and back into the blackness of the unknown. And along this ledge he crept, till it became so narrow that he could creep no farther, and in more than semi-darkness crouched, rifle in hand, the waves rushing and boiling just below, and

a cormorant snapping its beak at him within a yard.

In five minutes the beams of the foes' light appeared, and in another two the men themselves. They checked, aghast and spell-bound at the scene, wondering, maybe, where on earth, or under it, in this hall of devils, Monty had got, or precipitated himself, to. And Monty, aiming carefully, smashed, with a single bullet, the one electric light they happened to be using. It was a dainty shot, but the effect was—cataclysmal.

The holder of the light yelled and danced, two revolvers spoke with an intolerable bang in that echoing place, a hundred or so cormorants and shags took the water headlong with a volley of loud splashes, and as many more took wing with a rush, and all croaked and made unseemly noises together.

'Crack! crack! crack!' snapped Monty's automatic viciously, he firing as fast as he could pull trigger, and the cavern became full of the echoes of these reports, and of the heavier, slower revolver-shots in reply. A shower of stalactites and rock-chips came tinkling down, bullets splashed and spat on the water, and one went away and away, up into the black void of the cavern, singing to itself as it went to the devil knows where.

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It was quite evident that those gentlemen of the motor-car, whoever they were, had agreed that Monty Ravenhurst knew too much, and that this was as good a place to get rid of him as any other—in fact, better. But Monty fought. He was about the quickest shot in three counties, and the automatic made the most of his quickness. On the other hand, the men fired only round the corner of the tunnel, and Monty had no corner to fire round. If he fell wounded, no power of man could save him.

Then a bullet went through his cap, and—that was when he had to pause to reload—another spat rock-dust into his face. Once he heard a man yell, like a dog does when it is kicked, and he knew that he had aimed true somewhere.

Finally, he had to put down his rifle, for he had no more full magazines left, and it would take time that might cost him his life to load them, and take out his Colt automatic .22-calibre pistol. It was in the short interval of doing this that two of the men got bold, and fired together. One of the bullets thudded against the rock, bringing down a little rainbow of dust; the other drew a neat, angry red line under a gashed sleeve across his forearm, and it was as the electric spark feeling of that caught him that he realised that he was

doomed. There was no question of surrender ; they would kill him, anyhow.

Four shots were fired from the Colt in quick succession, driving his foes back for a moment, and then, quite suddenly, there was—silence. Yes, silence from the reports of the small arms, but not otherwise.

A single, gigantic, appalling roar of sound burst upon their ears. It passed, and was followed by other air-shaking, rock-trembling, nerve-shattering thunders that left all who heard them aghast and still. Nothing can describe the mere tremendous volume of explosion, of bursting cataclysmal noise, that rent the stillness, and seemed to shake the very cavern. It was gigantic, monstrous, stupefying, and beat the senses down into a dumb helplessness.

Then, in a pause, Monty heard a man exclaim, suddenly and quite distinctly, 'My Heaven, you chaps, it's a landslip! The bloomin' cliff's tumblin' down into the sea. Run!'

And they did. They ran all right. Monty could hear them go, even as the awful crashings began again, and he crept hastily to the mouth of the cavern, white-faced and haggard, to see what was happening.

And there he beheld the truth. Eight shining, smooth, and stupendous whales, all

fully sixty feet long, and some well over it, were amusing themselves by leaping, close inshore, clean out of the water. High into the air they shot, one after the other, leviathan polished columns, straight as hewn marble, and down they came, one after the other, flat upon the jade-green waves, in a column of spray as high as a ship's masts. It was a monumental sight, and the noise was deafening. No wonder the men thought the cliff was falling.

Still, those men would learn the truth and come back for him, and Monty was just about to turn and make a bolt for it in some other direction, when his gaze fell upon something on the face of the waters. It was the fishermen's boat returning, and the fishermen in her were making frantic signals to the men up on top of the cliff. What they wished to convey was that the men must embark at once. Monty agreed. Indeed, as he looked at the sea, he pursed his lips. It seemed too rough for that ticklish undertaking.

And after that—silence, just silence and the forlornness of utter desolation; for after that nothing happened, simply nothing at all. Monty remained as utterly alone with the birds as if he had never been anything else.

For hours he waited, binoculars in hand, waiting to see the fishing-boat returning to the mainland. He never saw it.

As the afternoon wore to evening, greatly surprised, he stole, Red Indian fashion, through the heather across the 'ness,' to spy out the landing-place. There was nothing there.

He climbed gingerly down to the rocks where the boat had landed the men of the motor-car, and also himself. The surf was breaking heavily in flying white walls of spray, and farther out he surprised a seal playing with something. His binoculars showed him that it was an oar.

Then, searching carefully, his binoculars revealed to him other things—bits of broken planking and a cap floating about. But there was no need to ask what had happened. The boat had smashed herself against the rocks. That much was clear. Only the how of it was not clear, nor was ever revealed.

Whether it had happened through sheer accident, whether one of the men had slipped into the water—perhaps one of the wounded—and in trying to save him all had lost their lives, or whether the men had quarrelled with the fishermen and a fight had taken place in the boat, no man will ever know, because no man that saw it was left alive to tell the

tale. Only the sea-birds and the seals know, and they cannot say.

Next day the launch arrived, and Monty Ravenhurst got back to the bosom of his friends. And that is about all, I think, unless—oh, the galleon? Yes, the galleon. But I don't sort of fancy there was a galleon, if you ask me. It is true that Monty Ravenhurst, and the rest, returned home worth a thousand or two, and with silent tongues; but once only, just once afterwards, Monty mumbled in his sleep, and all he said then was, 'Galleons be hanged! Boat—load—stolen—gold—melted—down—galleons—cipher—word—see.'

And those who think they can see are welcome.

SALVAGE.

A lost thing could I never find,
Nor a broken thing mend,
And I fear I shall be all behind
When I get towards the end.
Who will there be to comfort me?
And who will be my friend?

TRYALONG flung down his pencil and stared out of the window at the stretched green of the grass, at the gray, tottering sky. It was all he could see, that and where the wind kissed the grass, so that it turned over and laughed in silver ripples for miles.

The song of a lark and the pebble-clinking of a stonechat mixed with the deep drone of a bumble-bee to remind him that the world was still alive, and he—— After all, a man can't work till three in the morning for ever, and his drawings for the magazine were finished. He would go and take his fresh-air bath; only that, he knew, could pull him straight.

'If you don't keep absolutely in the fresh air you won't live. Probably you won't live anyway,' the specialist had said to him, 'without a sea voyage.'

But he was still alive, months after he should have been dead. Only—well, on his table lay

a letter from his wife, flatly refusing to bring the three children and live in 'such an out-of-the-way hole.' She would rather have the cheapest house in town than that miserable little bungalow, squatted down, as if trying to get out of the everlasting wind, by the estuary. She had her house. He paid for it somehow. And she had her own people living all round her. Also, she had a little shop.

He sighed heavily, and stared at the letter.

His face was a weak one, with sleepy eyes. Then suddenly it was a strong one. It was like one of those dissolving films at the cinema where one picture fades and another grows out of it. The eyes were no longer dreamy; they had narrowed coldly, and become hard.

He swung round, pulled on his Newmarket boots, got up, flung on his old Burberry, took up his little rifle, slipped a box of cartridges and a cake of chocolate into his pocket, and walked out.

'Thirty thousand pounds!' he muttered.
'Thirty thousand pounds! My Heaven!'

And he stopped dead.

A man was standing in the blaze of sunshine framed by the open front-door, and, the bar-like gleam instantly flashing to his eye, he saw that the man held an automatic pistol in his hand. The man must have come in at the

little gate, crossed the four yards of grass to the front-door—which was open all day—and stood there waiting, all quite silently.

He turned his head slowly, with the air of knowing some one was there, and regarded the artist with calm intent. The latter could not make out what sort of face he had, by reason of the glare. He did not speak, and for a space the artist didn't—he was too much amazed.

Then, just when the silence was getting tense and tremulous as a drawn wire about to snap, the man spoke. 'By name of Tryalong, I think—Bertie Tryalong?' he said.

'Yes.' Tryalong moistened his lips, and inwardly cursed his heart, which thumped in his throat. 'What the deuce d'you want?'

'You!'

Now, it will be conceded that that was an altogether strange answer, as strange as the manner of calling, and Tryalong moistened his lips again, wondering if the man were mad, or a detective come to arrest him on a case of mistaken identity, and what he should do with him either way, if he were. There was certainly no getting over the automatic pistol.

'Well?' Tryalong found himself speaking this time without knowing it; something

seemed to be taking charge of him inside, and had spoken for him—another self.

But for answer the man only half-lifted his automatic pistol, and said slowly, 'Thirty thousand pounds! My Heaven! Thirty thousand pounds!'

And Tryalong stiffened from head to heel, like a cat that has suddenly been brought face to face with a dog. He still held his little .22 automatic rifle in his right hand, and his finger was on the trigger. He was probably the quickest .22-calibre rifle-shot in the country. The chances were he could drop the man, like a flash, even now; and, besides, he knew how few men, how very, very few, are anything of a shot with the automatic pistol, even at point-blank range, if called upon to shoot quickly. 'Seems to me,' he replied dryly, 'you've come to the wrong shop.'

'D'you think I came before I knew for cert?' was the quiet answer.

'Or the wrong man?' queried Tryalong, his natural Welsh cunning beginning to ooze out all over him.

'Nor the wrong man.'

Tryalong turned his back with fine insolence not expected of a man who, medically, was booked to die three months ago; not expected by him, in fact. It was a new self acting

inside him, whom he didn't understand, and the new self had taken charge. 'Come inside,' he said, moving into the dining-room, and the man was behind him at the door of the dining-room in a wink. He seemed to expect that Tryalong would hide behind the door and drop him as he came in. But Tryalong only laughed. 'You needn't be afraid,' he said slowly, looking straight into the blue ring of the automatic-pistol muzzle. 'I sha'n't do that—at least, not this time.'

And for the first time the man, who had a heavy, flat, clean-shaven face, looking very tired, smiled. Nevertheless, he continued to cover Tryalong carefully, while the latter sat down with his little rifle across his knee, and——

'Take a seat,' said the artist cheerfully.

The man did, but he kept Tryalong covered, all the same.

'And now,' drawled Tryalong calmly—or, at least, he hoped calmly—'put that silly thing down, and tell me what's the trouble.'

The other smiled crookedly again, but continued to keep the automatic fairly on Tryalong's breast. 'The trouble is,' asserted he, 'you've got it. I know you've got it, and if you don't give it up this'll go off, and you'll die.'

‘Um! Three months late. I’m bound to die, anyway,’ rejoined Tryalong.

‘Yes, I know; but you may not—at least, not the doctor’s way, or any other, if you see sense.’

‘But it’s thirty thousand pounds! Have you thought? There’s no name on it, and it belongs—to the man that has it. I’m that man now. I’ve as much right to it as you.’

‘But it is mine.’ The other spoke almost dolefully.

‘You don’t know how much it means to me, to—others.’ Tryalong’s face softened a little as he said this.

‘Yes, I do; but’——

‘Oh, you know that too, do you? You seem to know a mighty lot about my business, Mr Whoever-you-are. Who’s been telling you? My wife?’

‘Your sister-in-law. I got to know her on purpose, in the shop. Your wife’s more loyal to you than you seem to think.’

Tryalong curled a sarcastic lip. ‘Really!’ he answered in a hard voice; and his face was not pleasant.

The other looked at him slowly and sighed. ‘It means more even to me,’ he urged.

‘And if I refuse?’

There was wicked rebellion in Tryalong's eyes now, and deep and suspicious anger. The mention of his wife's name had not been fortunate.

The man altered his tone. 'Oh, I shall have to shoot you,' he muttered slowly.

'That'll be murder, and you'll swing.'

'I know. I'll risk that. I'll get the money and get away. Nobody knows I've been here. Many know your doctor's report. They'll say you shot yourself. *See!*' And suddenly the pistol became fixed and steady.

There was a pause, while a bumble-bee nearly as big as a harvest-mouse came in at the lower half of the window, which was open, and, with the usual silliness of bumble-bees, insisted upon trying to get out of the top half, which was shut. Tryalong watched the fat, jolly, good-natured insect moodily. 'Well, look here,' he began at last. 'It isn't on me; search me, if you like. It isn't in my desk; search that. Here's my keys. It isn't to be found in the house, look as you will. *You* won't find it. I've hidden it, and I alone know where. If you kill me, you'll lose your thirty thousand, that's all.'

This certainly was a poser, and the man appeared to consider it so; at least, it was if Tryalong were speaking the truth, and not

merely telling an artful lie, and this the man appeared to consider too. 'But how am I to know that isn't a lie?' he said curtly.

'Well, shoot me and see, if you don't believe. I don't care much, my friend, I assure you. What with illness and comparative poorness, I seem to be a curse to people more than anything else, and life isn't so blame gay that I'd go crazy over quitting it.'

Tryalong regarded the bee again.

'You fool!'

The words came so suddenly, loudly, and angrily that they nearly made Tryalong jump.

'I—I beg your pardon?' he asked surprisedly.

'You fool!' the other repeated slowly and dispassionately.

'I know it.'

'Yes, but worse than you know. People don't think you're a curse, and certainly not your'—— He stopped, and said suddenly, as if remembering what he had come for, 'What will make you give up that thirty thousand? I mean, what without being shot?'

Tryalong considered the buzzing bee intently. 'Well, it is yours really, you know,' he allowed at last. 'But by law it would be mine, I suppose. "Let him take who has the power, and let him keep who can,"' he repeated slowly. 'What d'you think would be a fair offer?'

Mind, the tide would have washed it away, and you'd have lost it altogether but for me.'

'Darned if you're not straight, anyway.' The man looked at him with some surprise, as one who has beheld something good out of something he had thought to be bad, the while he made a mental calculation. 'Would five thousand do?' he asked tentatively at length.

'Call it seven.'

The man shook his head. 'No!'

Again Tryalong glared at the bumble-bee. 'Poor beggar! Covered with beastly little crawling mites, and they'll kill you in a few days. Worse off than I,' he muttered, eyeing the insect, for he had an odd and disconcerting trick of thinking two things at once, even at a critical moment, and—— 'All right,' he jerked out suddenly, jumping up. 'Come along, and I'll show you for five thousand. It isn't thirty exactly, that I'd built my joyous hopes on, but it'll do.'

'Send you to a warm country and get you cured,' urged the man, half apologetically and all coaxingly, as if a little ashamed of his own terms.

'Right-o!' replied Tryalong, and led the way out of the front-door. 'Come along!' he said.

They went round to the garden at the back of the bungalow, which was only not part of the surrounding field because it was wired off, and had a few fowls and vegetables in it. There were also bees. Save for six newly planted and very youthful apple-trees, there was nothing in the garden that stood two feet high. The 'quickset' hedge was a foot high; the wind allowed nothing higher.

One of the newly planted apple-trees seemed to have been there longer than the rest, for there was grass round it. 'I put that grass there,' explained Tryalong.

He took a spade and began to dig round that young tree, which the wind, it was likely, might never allow to bear fruit, and the man found a 'prong,' which is a 'fork,' and helped him. Tryalong dug round the tree, and very soon he had it up. Then he was on his knees, ladling out the earth and feeling for something. He found it, and pulled it out. That which he pulled out was a common or garden cheap cash-box. He produced a key to open it. Then, without saying anything, he stood up very slowly, and suddenly—so suddenly that the man had barely time to spring at him—he collapsed backwards.

The man hastily laid Tryalong down, and pounced upon the cash-box like a wild beast.

It was the first sign of feeling that he had shown. But there could be no getting away from the fact that the cash-box was as empty as a 'fired' cartridge-case.

For a few moments the man knelt there, staring at the useless thing. His lips moved, but no sound came from them. Finally he stared slowly round, and his eyes fell upon Tryalong. He frowned a little, and getting up heavily, hurried to the bungalow. He returned in a few minutes with a wet towel and a stiff 'peg' of brandy, and kneeling down beside Tryalong, he dealt with him kindly and quickly. But he searched him first—every seam, every lining of his clothes, his boots, and his socks; even the box magazine of his '22-repeater he examined.

At last he got Tryalong to come round.

Tryalong sat up and glared at the box. He collected his thoughts swiftly; his jaw set. He seemed to have changed somehow; opposition, defeat, the echo of the forlorn hope, the fact of being cornered, had changed him. From being a rather lazy dreamer, he had passed to a strong, silent man of action. In that lay his strength. He was one of the few men that could play a losing game, and one of the very few who enjoyed it.

He looked at the man hard, as if studying

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his thoughts. 'If you shoot me now, you'll never see your thirty thousand. Some fool'—he emphasised the word—'has taken it. I've got to get it back for you. But you're not bound to believe me; you must judge for yourself.'

He stopped abruptly, still watching the other's face, and the man slowly placed his hand upon Tryalong's shoulder. 'I never met a man who could swoon to order,' he said slowly. 'Besides, I had already made up my mind, anyway, before. But I am going to help you.'

'Thanks!' Tryalong heaved a sigh of relief which showed more appreciation of that help than any words could. 'Where d' you live?'

'Here at present,' was the answer. 'I'll help towards the housekeeping. D' you mind?'

'Mind? No, good man; I'm jolly glad!' Tryalong began to replant that unfortunate tree. 'I'm afraid this won't grow much,' he muttered, laughing. And then, all of a sudden, seriously, 'D' you know what you've got to face?'

'Pretty desperate job, I reckon,' allowed the man.

And Tryalong, searching each spadeful through his fingers carefully, nodded. 'This

island used to be the habitat of wreckers and thieves; to-day it is the abode of thieving wrecks. They do queer things here that men don't do elsewhere, and if you're not a native-born islander—look out! Now come inside, and we'll plan. Old Silky and his wife'll be back from the town soon, and we'll have tea. They "do" for me; I pay 'em five bob a week, and provide their board and keep. They don't steal—at least, not from me. Perhaps they know better. They aren't bad. Men say Silky went through a few thousand and a ranch—left him by an uncle—in his youth; yet Silky doesn't seem a fool. No; they aren't in this. They were both away holidaying at Shoreham when I found "it," and when I must have lost it. *They* don't know; somebody must have watched me. Question is—Does that somebody realise yet what he's got, and know what to do with it now he's got it? I doubt it.'

'I suppose you picked it up on the shore where it fell out of my pocket?' the man asked as they walked back to the house. 'I was walking along the shore, and remember passing you; but I don't think you saw me. You were waiting for a shot. I didn't find out my loss till that night. I guessed you might have found it—probably had. You

were sitting so near, and it wasn't there when I came by train to look next day. I found out about you, and went off to your wife's shop at Quaymouth, and bought some things there. She seemed most indignant when I asked some questions about you—seemed to think you might have done something wrong without her knowing, and I might be a detective. She appeared loyal enough to you. It was your sister-in-law who gave me most information when I went in to buy some more things later. Then I watched your life, and came in when I knew you were alone. I felt certain by then, because your footsteps were where I had dropped it, and I compared them with yours outside the gate.'

'And I kicked against it coming home from shooting. There was nothing else, only the letter-case, with "it" inside; no name or anything. I didn't see you at any time. I brought it home, and, as you see, buried it while I thought it over. I could not bring myself to use it at once. It seemed to me that, though nobody could prove ownership, it was not really all mine. I was trying to get rid of my conscience. Then you came.'

'Now we've lost it, both being fools!'

'Not lost, my friend; temporarily dispossessed. We're going to get it back—*must*!

There must be no such word as "cannot;" we *must!*'

That afternoon, before 'Silky' and his wife came back from shopping at Travant, the nearest town, Tryalong and the man—he flatly refused to reveal his name—went over every yard of ground in the garden. Silky might have been surprised if he had come home earlier than he was expected, and found them fitting one of his boots into various boot-marks about the garden. Mrs Silky would probably have been more surprised had she come home 'too previous-like' and discovered them doing the same thing with one of her 'spring-side' footgear.

Finally, Tryalong came away with a treasure—about a foot square of clayey earth upon which was a nailed-boot impression, neither Silky's nor Mrs Silky's, nor the man's, nor Tryalong's. Apparently somebody besides those four had been in the garden—ay, and near *the* apple-tree—during the last few days. Nobody had any right to be in that garden besides those four, and the place was too lonely to make chance trespassers likely.

Tryalong made a careful tracing of that footprint—two careful tracings. Then he locked the square of clayey soil, grass and all, away safely in an empty box.

They made themselves coffee for 'tea,' fed, and removed down the unmade road to the shore of the estuary.

'If,' explained Tryalong, 'he saw me pick it up, he'd be a shore-haunter. Once a shore-haunter, always a shore-haunter. Also, he'll be ignorant. Anyway, we're more likely to pick up his trail there than anywhere else.'

'What a pity you don't keep a dog!' mused the man. 'All this'd never have happened if you had.'

A faint haze, 'blue as a pigeon's wing,' hung over the background of estuary and furze-choked land alike, and the water resembled smoked glass. The tide was at its highest, and seemed about to brim over, yet the water was so still that it appeared to be stagnant. A couple of gray wagtails, their summer work done, were chaperoning two brown young ones southward—running about and catching flies as they went—along the pebbly shore; and a great silver herring-gull, like a vulture, was slowly flapping up and down in an eternal patrol for offal.

One starling rose from the pebbles at their approach, and some fish thing made a ring in the smoked glass that spread and spread rollingly like a smoke-ring. Very far away across

the water the spires of the churches of gloomy, and by no means godly, Quaymouth poked upwards out of the haze, and the low roar of trains came to them, all the way from there, quite distinctly across the water. So near they were to that mirage which men call civilisation, and yet so utterly in the loneliness of the wilds.

Something of the spirit of the place must have descended upon both men, I think, keeping them silent. One felt that things might easily happen here, only a quarter of a mile from the dust-curtained main road, which would not happen anywhere else. A man might die here, slowly and by inches, and shout himself silent, yet never a soul might hear. And always close, so close, just beneath the water, was the ever evil, always sinister, mud-ooze of the estuary; when the tide went out it would be the estuary—miles on miles of treacherous death.

There is a fascination of the estuary and the marsh, and for a moment it held the man motionless, staring out upon the scene, and Tryalong, watching him, smiled. That fascination had long ago entered *his* soul.

‘Desolation—desolation—desolation!’ muttered the man. ‘Heavens, what a place!’

‘But you have the sounds of civilisation

quite close from Quaymouth over yonder,' suggested Tryalong ironically.

'And that only makes it worse. So near, and yet so far. Alone!' He paused, and then, turning to follow Tryalong, who knew every yard, along the shore, 'A man could write a mighty book here,' he added.

'Or die a silent death.'

'Yes.' The man started as if Tryalong's sarcasm had called him back to realities. 'Yes.' And then, as though finding no words to express what he felt, 'You're right.'

They proceeded slowly, for it requires a special training to walk quickly on a pebbly beach, till the gloomy, still, crouching furze on their right hand gave place to a high grass-grown bank, upon which the delicate-looking tamarisks grew in a long, feathery line. On the other side was more water, marked out in great square basins with low grass banks between—a ruined oyster-works.

'It gets worse,' muttered the man, peering over into the black depths.

'Yes. If you walked along those banks at night you'd drown, or go to your Maker stuck head first in the mud. I am one of the few men who could get over there in the dark, and—live,' was Tryalong's cheerful reply. And the man believed him.

Tryalong made straight for a spot where the sea-wall was very high and faced with great blocks of concrete, some of them broken and piled. The wall faced the full rip of the south-west gales here, and looked like it.

In the gaps—which were also gaps in the path—was sticky, blue clay, binding together tier upon tier of deep-sunken wood faggots.

‘If our friend is really a shore-haunter, he would cross over here,’ said Tryalong, stopping at the first gap, ‘and leave a good, sticky trail behind. You see, it’s easier than sticking to the shore here, where the pebbles give place to stones and bits of broken concrete as large as your head.’

He stopped, and crawled to the top of the bank, and, screened by the spiky, glaucous stems of the marram grass, pulled out a pair of prism binoculars, and carefully searched the whole panorama.

‘Never know who’s watching you on the estuary,’ he explained. ‘Beggars may be spotting us now, even.’

It took ten minutes, that survey, for every yard of ground had to be gone over, and there was plenty of it. Then Tryalong slid down, and, taking one of his tracings, began to examine every footprint in the soft clay.

The two men bending down there made a

strange picture when you reflected upon their relations. But they did not reflect. They worked the ground carefully, till at last Tryalong stood up. 'Got him!' he cried. 'I've read about the wonders of the aboriginal native elephant-trackers, and now we've got a task just as hard, but it's our only chance. Come along. That's the hoof of the thief, right enough.'

Together and bent, those two began that strange trailing. They lost the footprints on the pebbles; but Tryalong, knowing the ways of the place, cast down to the hard mud just on the edge of the shore, where a man wishing to avoid the shingle would walk, and picked it up again.

They followed it for five hundred yards or so, and then Tryalong ran to the sea-bank with his binoculars, just to see if anybody was coming.

'We should excite suspicion in a suspicious people possessed of evil consciences if we were seen tracking like this,' he explained. He was down again in a minute, beckoning to the man. 'Into these tamarisks,' he ordered hurriedly. 'There's somebody coming. It's a man, a regular shore-haunter. Lie flat. Don't move.'

Their view, as they lay on the slope of the bank, was of the top of the bank above,

and of the water beneath, and of the delicate green feathery tracery of the tamarisk-foliage against the sky. Wasps—strangely out of place *there*, of all places—were canvassing the tamarisk-foliage for the drops of moisture which it held all day, long after everything else had been parched and dried up; and ants were doing the same thing. Now and then an ant would rear up and threaten with his jaws a wasp who had come too near. The ants were no larger than the wasps' heads, but that made no difference to their courage.

'What a lot of things you see that you never thought of when you lie right down amongst nature like this!' whispered the man thoughtfully, watching the insects.

Tryalong nodded, and pointed in silence. A tiny, bob-tailed wren—out of place as the wasps here right out along the shore—was hunting among the concrete blocks and boulders and seaweed for sandhoppers and the like. She was not two yards from them.

Suddenly she fled along the shore, uttering her little scolding alarm-note piercingly in that great silence, and a sudden swish in the marram grass up above made them crouch closer.

They saw the form of a man above against the sky, tall and straight and shabby. He

jumped down at a gap in the concrete, walked over the clayey space between, climbed again, and passed away along the bank.

Tryalong poked his binoculars out through the foliage of the tamarisks, and watched him go. He covered him for some time, then sat up. 'He's gone for a bit,' he stated, 'but he'll be back later. He's searching the shore for wood, and anything else he can find. A regular shore-loafer, like a gull, descendant of one of the old wreckers, I shouldn't wonder—one of a gang. Come along. Now for his dainty footsteps, my friend.'

Together they crawled out, and hurried to the place where the man had crossed the gap in the wall. His footprints were plainly to be seen. Tryalong compared them with his tracing, and—laughed.

The man looked up at him, and, for the first time, laughed too. 'Why, how did you know?' he asked. 'You did know.'

'Because he was knocking about here when I found "it." Always hanging about here watching people. There's two of 'em. Now you know what we've got to do. They are his footprints all right.'

The other nodded, and returning to the shadow of the tamarisks, sat down and lit a cigarette.

'We've got to wait till he comes back, and charge him with the theft. But what if he won't own up?' Tryalong continued.

'There's only one thing to do—get him down, and search him,' grunted the man.

'And supposing it isn't on him? Supposing he's hidden it, same as I did?'

'Then we've got to put the fear of God into him till he tells,' finished the man grimly.

'Um! But he may have sent it up?'

'No use. The rules are printed plainly upon it. It must be sent in on the thirtieth, and this is only the twentieth. No; he'd keep it a bit, and think over it. Such men keep such things in their pockets, as a rule. Besides, he may not even know the value of what he's got. Probably he doesn't.'

'May not.'

Tryalong sat down too, and smoked, every now and again taking a look through his glasses.

A flock of ringed plover passed them, with a rush of wings, close above the water, a sign that the tide was beginning to fall. Far out a redshank flew, with a shrill-whistled 'Työ! työ!'—and that was another sign—and a heron, out of nowhere, suddenly appeared, letting himself down out of the sky on a wonderful long volplane of half a mile without

a wing-flap, and that was the surest sign of all that the tide was already on the ebb. 'Craank!' he cried, and, settling, began literally to walk upon the water, it appeared—which was a proof that the mud at that spot was only just below the surface. Then, after half-an-hour——

'He's coming,' cried Tryalong. 'I can see his head moving about the grass. Now I can see him. He's been wading in the shallows of the old oyster-works, and grabbing fish out of the holes. Keep quite still.'

As he spoke Tryalong carefully put down his glasses, and looked to his little automatic rifle. The man examined his pistol. He did not speak, but threw away his cigarette.

In about ten minutes the man appeared, walking slowly along the shore, a sack on his back.

'What it contains goodness knows,' remarked Tryalong, and went out to meet him.

The man stared at Tryalong, and they both 'passed the time o' day.' He had a peculiar way of looking not so much at people as past them, as if gazing, fascinated, at something which he, but not they, could see beyond. It was rather uncanny; in such a place it was extremely so.

Tryalong bent down and compared his

traced footprint with that which the shore-haunter had just made in the soft, wet, muddy sand on the edge of the pebbles, the owner of them watching him. The prints were identical.

‘These two, you see, are the same,’ he said slowly, while the fellow stared down at him. ‘And this tracing I took from beside one of the apple-trees in my garden. There was something buried under that apple-tree—a letter-case. Where is it?’

‘How should I know?’ was the answer. And the ‘h’ *was* used.

‘You must know. Where is it?’

The shore-loafer was still looking at him, but past him, in a strange, blank, fixed gaze. He had taken no notice of the other man.

‘You know. Give it up!’ ordered the man sharply.

And the shore-loafer turned and fixed him with his odd stare.

‘It may be on you now,’ continued Tryalong. ‘Mind, I shall send you to prison.’

And instantly, for answer, the shore-loafer sprang past them, and away. It was very sudden, and very quick, but not quick enough. Tryalong was at his heels like a terrier, and so close behind that the fellow had to turn. Instantly he swung his sack, aiming it at

Tryalong's head, but, quick as light, Tryalong was upon him. His left arm shot up, and the blow slid down it. His right palm flashed to the fellow's chin. He made some lightning-quick play with hands and feet, and—the fellow was upon his back. Moreover, Tryalong was holding his right hand in both of his, and when the fallen man tried to rise, he cried out suddenly, and was still. The twist his wrist had received seemed to pin him.

‘Quick! Search him!’ Tryalong cried to the man. ‘He’s helpless as I have him now; can’t get up or hit.’

But both had, even as they spoke, heard the clatter of stones behind, and, turning, beheld a little, shabby, dark man, with a gun in his hand, running towards them. It was a single-barrelled gun, and he was breathing hard, as one who has run some distance.

‘This,’ said Tryalong’s companion calmly, ‘represents what your field-glasses did *not* see.’ And he drew his automatic pistol.

But Tryalong, leaping back, had picked up his little rifle and fired, even as the man aimed, before any one could move. The quickness of his action was extraordinary. He did not seem to aim, as most men know aiming with a rifle. He simply fired with both eyes open—instantly. Yet the bullet hit a pebble exactly at

the new-comer's feet, and that worthy dropped his gun with a yell.

Between that and Tryalong's arrival at his side was a matter of seconds. He picked up the single-barrelled gun and hurled it into the water, and, even as the splash sounded, closed with his assailant.

The latter aimed a blow at his stomach. It was caught deftly in both of Tryalong's hands, and before that man knew what had happened he found himself on his back, with a very definite pain in his wrist.

Tryalong himself went racing back to the other two, who were grappling it out together, the shore-loafer getting rather the better of it—but only till Tryalong arrived. Then the loafer was conscious of a very certain grasp from behind, of a pain in his arms that made him yell, and of being on the ground, pinned, and held as in a vice.

‘Search him, quick!’ Tryalong panted.

His companion, whose nose was bleeding, turned to with vigour.

‘Here it is!’ he shouted, after a few seconds, and straightened up as he knelt, holding a letter-case in his hand.

He opened it, and examined a paper inside. At the same moment he heard Tryalong's

voice yelling at him, 'Look out, man! Fall sideways!'

He did. Something of great peremptoriness in the order impelled him to instant obedience, and it was as well. As he did so a boulder of some size came down with a crash upon the spot where his head had been. He turned to look up as he lay, and in the same instant he was conscious of two sets of impressions at once. One was of the second shore-loafer bending over him, left hand stretched out to clutch the contents of the letter-case, the right hand holding a murderous clasp-knife aloft. The other was of the flutter of a skirt, seen out of the corner of his eye, of the little crack of Tryalong's rifle, and of the instant withdrawal of the figure above him, to the accompaniment of howls.

But when he got up he discovered that it was not Tryalong who had fired. *He* was bending over the first loafer, whom he again held helpless on the ground; the second loafer was dancing round and round, holding his arm. And standing beside Tryalong, quite calmly, with the rifle in her hands, and a smile upon her face, stood a stout young woman of that lolloping, walloping type that attracts some men strangely.

'That,' she was saying to Tryalong with a

laugh, 'is the reward you get for teaching your wife to be a rifle-shot.'

And Tryalong, looking up at her, laughed back. 'Where the blazes did *you* spring from?' he asked.

'Oh, I only came up to collect some winkles from under the boulders. There are heaps there, you know, and it seems that even a wife may come in handy *sometimes*,' was the half-reproachful, half-mocking rejoinder. Then, as an afterthought, 'May I ask what on earth you people all think you are playing at?'

Tryalong looked at the man who had picked up the letter-case. The second shore-loafer had already started to run away, seeing that the battle had turned against him, and being much pained with a bad bullet-grazed hand.

Tryalong released the first shore-loafer, who at once followed his companion, having no wish to be again pinioned by this strong invalid, who made up in science of trick-work more than he might lack in strength.

'What,' said Tryalong to the man, '*are* we supposed to be playing at?'

'W-e-l-l.' The man held the piece of paper that he had taken from his letter-case open in his hand, and laughed a laugh of such utter gladness that both stared at him. 'My friend Mr Tryalong—your husband, I presume,' he

said, bowing—‘has been playing for the wherewithal to take a long sea-voyage into warmer climes, and thus to save his life. I have been playing for the wherewithal to pay for an operation by the very best specialist upon my wife, from whom I was parted, but whom, I now find, when she may die, I cannot do without. Hence my wish to save her life. We have, in short, in the one case, been playing for ten thousand pounds’——

‘Five,’ interrupted Tryalong.

‘I said ten,’ repeated the man; ‘and in the other case for twenty thousand pounds; or, if you prefer to be more precise, for a winning lottery bond, which I lost, and your husband found, but which was stolen from him by those men you have, madam, so cleverly routed. But if you want to know the absolute truth, I picked up this same bond, in another letter-case, some months ago. I could never find the owner. I shall stay, self-invited, with your husband until the money comes, and I have kept my word to him. Then I shall go. Who I am does not matter. But I *do* hope,’ he finished, ‘that you will be as happy over your sea-trip together as my wife and I will be together, too.’

‘How about it?’ Tryalong asked slowly, turning and looking at his wife.

‘Good enough,’ was the reply, caught up in a little sob, as she slipped her arm into his. ‘And—and I *had* saved twenty-five pounds from my little shop towards it, old man. Only—oh, Bertie, you’d never have believed that was what I took the shop for. Now, would you?’

‘Bless us!’ he said; ‘how was I to know?’

And the three walked slowly homewards together through the dusk.

WATCHERS OF THE MUD.

A SMUGGLING STORY.

I.

PEOPLE and poets have praised the dawn as if it had no drawbacks. I do not know why. There is no hour of the twenty-four so dismal as that dread, dead, stagnant hour before the sun rises, when the awful wan dawn-haze creeps over things from nowhere special, not dispersing but showing up the darkness, revealing night in a disgraceful manner—stark, pitiless night, stripped of the merciful purple cloak; night unashamed and blatant, cruel, cold, and monstrous.

It was at this time and in such a light that old 'Stiletto' Dobson loomed like a blurred smudge out of the surprised and frowning darkness along the top of the sea-wall. He was going eel-spearing; at least, he carried a thing like Neptune's trident, which, by those who go down to the mud of the estuary to earn their daily bread, is said to be used for no other purpose.

People do not go eel-spearing for fun, you understand. It is not the kind of thing one

would do unless one were forced. Also, it is a lonely business. It consists in plunging about in the mud-slime of the estuary in pursuit of eels. It is essentially a trade of the very poor—of, in fact, the marshmen, who are a race in themselves, and whose fathers and fathers' fathers were the old fowlers that we read about, and smugglers too at times.

'Stiletto' Dobson was, or appeared to be, an exception to the rule. Eel-spearing seemed to do him well, and, to use his own expression, he liked himself nicely on it.

He was a small, lithe, quick, black-and-tan terrier of a man, with smooth, effortless, swift motion, a soft voice, and eyes that shone like gulls' eyes. He appeared to divide his time between eel-spearing, wild-fowl shooting, and sleeping. One presumes he ate; but if any one ever saw him eat, the fact has not been left on record. If one judged by his white hair and quite a thousand wrinkles, he was an old man. On the other hand, if one judged him by his eyes and his manner, he was young. No one had ever seen him engage in anything else than the occupations named; he was known to have inherited nothing, and in his young, or perhaps I should say more youthful, days it is on record that he was as poor as the

rest of his race. But his daughters did not 'go to service,' nor did they work at a laundry. Mrs Dobson had been seen in a real silk dress ; and, greatest proof of all that he was rich, old Dobson paid for his gun and his dog licence every year, and 'never asked no one for a fill,' which is a pipeful of tobacco.

The nickname of 'Stiletto' was a remnant of his wild and youthful days, and of an affray with knives, out of which he had emerged with a scar over his left eye and the present Mrs Dobson as his reward.

'Stiletto' Dobson made his way along the sea-wall with the short, quick strides affected by all his breed. The light brightened at every stride, and redshanks flew up from the marsh on his left, and fled, crying, 'Työ ! työ !' Stiletto called them 'cussed tooks,' because they advertised his presence. Anon he came to some deserted oyster-beds, to build which some 'company' had been floated, gone smash, and fled to America ; while the place itself had been pretty well floated out by the tides again. Here the concrete blocks of the wall had been broken and torn asunder and cast all ways by the water, and here, in a cave formed by these blocks, Dobson halted. Presently he began to burrow like a rat among the pebbles and

the rubbish, till suddenly he struck tin. In fact, he unearthed cases of tin to the number of five, and all of them packed full of tobacco. That, however, was his cousin's business, the tobacco being smuggled, and destined later to be taken inland. What concerned him now was another matter altogether.

Beside the square cases lay some long, thin ones. They were not big, and looked as if they might hold any little innocent things, such as umbrellas, for instance. Now, if any one had told old Dobson that each of those cases held two Lee-Enfield military magazine-rifles, no one would have looked more shocked and surprised than he. Nevertheless, that was precisely what they did hold. Seeing that two great Powers were at that moment at issue with one another, magazine-rifles were fetching their weight in gold at the time. These rifles might, if smuggled out of the country secretly, be of value. At least, that was the hypothesis upon which Mr Dobson appeared now to be working. One of those Powers, at any rate, was willing to pay almost anything for good rifles and ammunition. Dobson wrapped some old sacking round one case, shouldered it with his trident, so that to the casual eye it might appear to be part of

his paraphernalia for the capture of the elusive eel, and, with bare feet and trousers tucked up to his knees, boldly squelched out on to the mud.

Now and then he would stop to probe with his spear at the mud, in the orthodox fashion used by eel-fishers. From the shore the action looked natural enough, and one so familiar to the coastguard half a mile away, watching things in general through his telescope, that he did no more than favour the old man with a passing glance. Had that coastguard known that there were, in point of fact, no eels where Dobson was dibbling, and, further, that Dobson knew there were none, he might have taken more interest in the matter. But he did not know, and that is why old Dobson manœuvred, always spearing zealously, until he reached a small island of gravel and marram grass well out in the middle of the estuary. Here he hid the two rifles, at a spot specially chosen beforehand, and forthwith speared his way back to shore again.

Six times did 'Stiletto' Dobson manage, always apparently by chance, to spear his way from shore to that island. He never approached the island from the same point, of course; and once he spent half-an-hour in spearing eels in real earnest, just to make

things look all correct; and each time did he convey to, and hide two rifles on, that island. It was very neatly done indeed.

When it was all over he returned to his hiding-place, half filled his eel-basket with tobacco—it was a singularly capacious eel-basket, by the way—placed the few slimy eels he had caught on top, slung all over his back, and started with his little, quick stride on the home journey. The tobacco, it may be remarked, was to go into England, the rifles to go out, and the handling of both was a dangerous business.

It was some fifteen minutes later, just as he rounded a bend and came in sight of a rotten old wooden quay where all the villagers' boats lay, that 'Stiletto' Dobson got his first shock. A group of marshmen were gathered round the head of the quay. Many of them, like Dobson, had evidently come in from eel-spearing, carrying their baskets on their backs. That was nothing, however. It was the smudges of blue—Royal Navy serge—among them that made Dobson catch his breath. There was no less a person than Mr Fox, Chief Officer of Coastguards for the station, accompanied by two men. That they were on duty he knew, because he saw their sword-sticks. Heaven, the Admiralty, and their

quiet, alert selves alone knew what they wanted, though.

Stiletto did not pause, not being a fool. Also, he was already too close to risk turning back. He drew a deep breath, shut his teeth together with an audible snap, and kept straight on. And it seemed as if the basket on his back had got suddenly as heavy as lead. Stiletto was distinctly unhappy, for which reason, perhaps, he assumed a gay smile, and broke forth into song, after the custom of all eel-spearers when at work.

Nicholas Fox, Chief Officer of His Majesty's Coastguards for the station at the village of Quigley Harbour, had evidently been stirred up considerably by something, and his bearings were heated, as it were. As a matter of fact, he had received an imperative message from the Admiralty, informing him that large quantities of contraband goods were leaking into the country, and, what was worse, that a friendly Power had urgently represented to His Majesty's Government the fact that still larger quantities of modern arms and ammunition were leaking out of the country into the hands of that friendly Power's enemies. It was not known on what part of the coast the smuggling was taking place, but it would not be well for that chief officer in whose

district the leakage was allowed to continue. Apparently the Government had cussed the Admiralty, the Admiralty had cussed the coastguards, and the coastguards, in terror for their billets, were exercising their right to examine everything brought on shore, from a winkle up to a fishing-smack. And here was 'Stiletto' Dobson, pitchforked by fate into the very centre of the whole stirred-up hornets' nest.

It was a beautiful situation, and it was not made any the more interesting from the villagers' point of view by the sight of Squire Quigley, J.P., in the centre of the crowd, keeping a hard, cold gray eye upon people in general.

'Stiletto' Dobson hurried up to the sullen group as if he was anxious to witness the fun, instead of wishing himself anywhere else in the wide world.

'What's t' matter?' he queried of a Voice that lived inside a pair of huge terra-cotta trousers such as fishermen affect.

'Ye've got t' be searched, I reckons, like t' rest of us. So naw ye knaws, dan't ye?' replied the Voice.

Stiletto smiled, and the Squire, turning that moment, noticed the smile, for it was not quite an ordinary smile. A close observer

would have seen that each time he smiled Stiletto solemnly shut his left eye. It was not a wink. If one had not seen him smile often without doing it, one would have said it was a 'trick' he had. It might have been a sign or a signal.

'Hullo, Dobson! Earning an honest living for a change, eh? Glad to see you haven't been poaching my duck—what? Give you a week's imprisonment next time you come up before me, my man,' shouted Squire Quigley.

Dobson smiled and touched his cap. He and Squire Quigley had been at war for years over the matter of poaching, and the usually good-hearted Squire's bitter enmity against the man was a byword of the district. This was the first time the tall, powerful, blonde-bearded gentleman had spoken to the little man for two years.

The searching of the boats—the little turtle-backed gunning-punts—continued in a sullen silence. The coastguards worked with the slow, ordered haste which is peculiar to our navy and to naval men. They did the thing thoroughly, being fearful for their posts, overlooking nothing, tapping here, poking there, examining and turning out all things under their leader's quick, penetrating, brown eyes.

At last, when there were only Dobson and one more man left to be examined, the Squire deliberately stretched his arms and yawned.

‘Well, Fox,’ he remarked, ‘don’t seem to have made much of a catch—eh? Sort of a mare’s nest—what? Think I will get away and dress for dinner.’

He turned away, and then, seeming to recollect something, came back.

‘Have any of you men some eels to sell?’ he asked. ‘Weakness of mine, you know. Like ‘em for breakfast,’ he went on, turning to the coastguard officer as if in explanation.

Two or three men offered him their catch, but he called to Dobson, who had made no move.

‘Here, my man. No one shall say I am not just, or that I boycott any fellow. I’ll give the devil his due for once, and buy your eels, just to encourage you in honest paths, though I expect I shall be harbouring the fox that eats my pheasants, or duck rather—eh, what? How many have you there?’

Dobson ‘lowed’ that there were ‘bout six,’ and the company were properly impressed when the Squire gave him five shillings and took the basket.

‘No, I am not a proud man,’ Squire Quigley

muttered, weighing the basket. 'One of the old school, Fox. Don't mind dirty hands.—You can call for the basket in the morning, Dobson.—Good-night, Fox. Glad you find all my people honest.' And he turned away with that deliberate, heavy stride which is the mark of the wielders of the law in general, and of Englishmen in particular.

'Stiletto' Dobson watched the retreating broad back with a grimace indicative of nothing in particular save blankness. He felt as if some one had poured a bucket of cold water upon his stomach. He was wondering vaguely what sort of a volcano would open up when the Squire found that which was hidden below the eels in that basket.

Mr Fox was watching the broad back also, but his thoughts were different. He was thinking that he ought to have searched that basket, but—well, the Squire was what is known as a 'funny' man, good-natured, but quick-tempered and intolerant of interference. 'Anyway,' thought Mr Fox, 'he will be as good a searcher as any, perhaps, being a J.P.'

'That's done ut,' whispered Dobson's cousin in his ear. 'I knawed ye'd somethin' on ye when I sees ye smile th' pass smile. Better 'ide, Stiletto, I reckon.'

Stiletto said nothing. He waited till the coastguards left, then went openly to his cottage. But he never entered the cottage. He went in at the front-gate and out at the back through the garden hedge. He fetched a circle of one mile through lonely fields, and returned to the oyster-beds afore mentioned. Here, in the centre of the beds, were the old factory and the house of the manager. The place was now tumbling to decay, but was still water-tight. In its way it was a strategic position, for none could approach the place except along one of the narrow walls dividing each oyster-bed from others, and in doing so he would be in full view of the house.

'Stiletto' Dobson entered the silent, echoing place, stepping like a cat. He passed to an old fireplace, before which the manager had, no doubt, sat at his ease on winter evenings. He felt at a hole in the wall where once the grate had been bolted in, and, lo! even as he slipped his fingers into the cavity the whole concern revolved on its hinges, revealing two steps downwards, and a little room, a tiny room, quite dry and comfortably furnished, taking its light from an aperture in the chimney farther up!

It was evident that whoever organised this gang of modern smugglers, or, as they pre-

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ferred to be called, contraband runners, knew what he was about. As a matter of fact, they did not know who was their leader. None of them had ever seen him. His name was represented merely by a mark, a sign. Presumably he lived in London. They did not know. He gave his orders to deputies through a speaking-tube, and they conveyed them verbally to the marshmen who did the work. The dividing of the profits, the planning, the sale of the contraband, all was the work of that mysterious leader whom no one had ever seen, and yet who seemed to know so much, even to the doings of every man employed.

'Stiletto' Dobson had gone into hiding simply because he expected that within a few hours at the least the Squire would discover the smuggled tobacco in his eel-basket, and in consequence the country would be raised against him. His wife gave out that he had gone on a cruise in a fishing-smack. She knew what to say, that good woman—had had to say it before, in fact. What, after all, would have been more natural for such a man than to go on a fishing cruise?

Therefore, when his cousin arrived—on his hands and knees mostly—just before dawn, with provisions for the exile, and reported

that nothing had transpired, Dobson scratched his lean head and looked worried.

'Pend upon ut, they're layin' low. I knows th'm. They think they're goin' t' catch I by keepin' quiet. I sees their little game,' he said.

And his cousin—a sour-faced, bullet-headed, clean-shaven man—nodded in wise concord. 'Sez I to myself, sez I, yew go careful. Th'm goin' to lie low,' he admitted. 'So I come four mile roun' in case old Fox's men be followin' of me.'

But when a week had gone by and nothing happened, Dobson's perplexity changed to fear. He could not remain in a secret chamber, six feet by eight, all his life, he said. The natural energy of the man began to run to impatience, as a lettuce runs to seed. Every other day his cousin arrived with supplies and no news—that was the terrifying part of it. The Squire went about with his natural face and his customary manners; Mr Fox and his men did no more; it was inconceivable.

At last Stiletto came out. He could bear the hiding no longer. He kept to his cottage at first, but as weeks wore on and nothing happened, he commenced to steal out and get about his business. For one thing, the

barge which stole up the deserted harbour from time to time, ostensibly to load gravel, and, during the dark hours, removed the rifles from Dobson's hiding-place on the little island afore mentioned out into the Channel, where she transhipped them, ammunition and all, to a big tramp-steamer whose business it was to carry them half across the world to the place where they were urgently needed—this barge was beginning to get impatient. She wanted more rifles. She got them at last; for Dobson, emboldened by the inaction of the Squire, fell to work again, and—nothing happened.

II.

It cannot be said that Mr Fox was very pleased. He was a man who loved ease, and he got it not in those autumn days that followed after the events set forth in the last chapter. The Admiralty informed him more urgently than ever that he was neglecting his duty—he and several others, for it was only vaguely guessed that the contraband was being run from the south coast—that the friendly Power had again made urgent representations regarding the gun-running.

‘Holy Moses!’ exclaimed Mr Fox, banging the telegraph instrument with his fist. ‘Do

they think I grow 'em in my back-garden, then?'

But he flung on his coat and ordered his men—there were twelve on the station—to turn out, sword-sticks and all. Six he ordered to patrol the shore of Quigley Harbour southwards to its mouth, and six he took with him northwards towards the oyster-beds. Contrary to the usual method, however, he ordered his men to patrol inland on their way out, and along the shore on their return journey. Thus any smugglers flying from the one party might reasonably be expected to run into the arms of the other.

It was a foggy, though moonlight, night, cold and still. Mr Fox argued that this was a good night for smuggling, and if any were going on in his district—and he was not yet certain even of that—this might be a good time to endeavour to discover it. He had no fixed plan, beyond the steady patrolling of the harbour, and not the slightest suspicion of 'Stiletto' Dobson and his relations.

And Stiletto was moving along the shore surreptitiously a mile ahead of them at that very moment.

On his back Stiletto was carrying some three hundred rounds of solid-drawn brass cartridges. They had that evening come down

by motor-car from London, two thousand rounds in all, and it was Stiletto's business to convey them from the corn-stack with a hollow inside in which they were hidden out to the little island on the mud, where they would be called for by gravel-barge later.

It was not in itself a very difficult task. The wild-duck were in, and Stiletto carried his heavy 8-bore gun slung across his back. He was a well-known wild-fowler, and none would challenge his presence here with his gun, provided always that he kept to the foreshore and was not actually seen with the heavy cartridge-cases on his back. As to that danger, he trusted to his ears to warn him of any one approaching along the shingle, and he had several hiding-places for the cartridges made along his route in case of a mishap.

One thing only he had not reckoned upon. Mr Fox had ordered his men, as has been said, contrary to general custom, to start their beat on each side from the extreme end, and to work their way back along the shore, instead of out along the shore, as usual, thus causing the two parties to converge upon each other, and join at a place near the ruined oyster-beds.

Thus it happened that 'Stiletto' Dobson,

hurrying before the sound of approaching footsteps in his rear, suddenly found himself running into the arms of similar sounds in front, and came to a halt with a groan.

Luckily for him, in that great silence which lives on the desolate estuary when there is no wind, sound carries a long way. The two patrols approaching along the shore from opposite directions were yet some distance off. On the other hand, 'Stiletto' Dobson happened just to be caught between two of the alternative hiding-places he had made for his contraband in case of need. He dared neither to go back to the one nor forward to the other. The position was, therefore, somewhat lugubrious, and did not give Stiletto any pleasure at all. He swore profanely.

There was only one thing for it—he must bolt straight across the oyster-beds to the old factory. If he could do that, and hide the cartridges in the secret room, he could face anybody with his antiquated wild-fowl gun on his shoulder and a smile on his face.

For a moment Dobson halted to listen. Then his face hardened, and he started to run. The other people were running now also. They must have heard him.

His course lay at right angles to the seawall along a path between the oyster-beds,

which was lower than it. It was no pleasure of Dobson's that the mist should choose that moment to thin slightly, however, and let down a filtering moon-haze. A redshank—that curse of all wild-fowlers—leapt up from somewhere on the shimmering mud, yelling fiendishly 'Tyop! tyop!' as it fled. It was enough to give him away and mark his course, even if a curlew had not finished the job, a moment later, by racing into the dark, a vision of great wings, leaving behind a long-drawn, wailing cry of 'Cour-lip! cour-lip!'

'Cussed tooks!' muttered 'Stiletto' Dobson, and a shout sounded from the sea-wall. He had been seen.

But this meant more than the mere fact. It meant also that in all probability he had been seen to be laden with something, not clearly, perhaps, but enough for those who followed to couple with the fact that he was running away, and draw fairly correct conclusions.

The faint blurs of men racing along the sea-wall faded out in mist as he glanced back, for they had to run some way at right angles to his course before hitting the direct path.

The coastguards gained quickly. He could hear the steady thud, thud of that ordered

trot which is called a 'double,' and means discipline all the world over. He turned the corner of the echoing, deserted building, his breath coming in great gasps, his knees bent and almost giving out, his eyes starting.

And a shout, a challenge, calling him to halt, sounded not a hundred yards behind.

'Stiletto' Dobson stumbled blindly into the pit-like darkness of the first room he came to. It was not the right room; not the room with the revolving fireplace and the secret room behind it which meant safety. Not the right room at all; but that was round another corner, and he had no time, even if he had had the strength, to get to it—which I doubt.

Here in this room, however, in the earth, below the gaping boards of the floor, was a hole, without a top or any fancy device, which Dobson had now and then used to store odds and ends in. It was a poor enough hiding-place for contraband ammunition, and was sure—quite sure—to be discovered by the coastguards when they instituted that terrible, ordered search which he knew would follow upon his capture. But it must serve. At the present it would give him time, say a few minutes, in which to think.

Groping in the blackness, he bundled the cases of cartridges into the hole—he could

have found it blindfold, I fancy—and scraped some plaster and rubbish over it with his hands.

Then he stopped and ‘froze,’ and there followed that silence which comes when one disturbs a rat which is gnawing in a room. Something had moved *inside* the room, something surreptitious and menacing.

Dobson listened between laboured gasps. Outside, only ten yards from the door, the coastguards were running and shouting, and ‘Stiletto’ Dobson half rose. Then he went down again with a thud and a sob of out-driven breath. Something, some one, had sprung upon him from within the room—from behind.

There was a flash of lights, the sound of a frenzied, wordless struggle, the gleam of Mr Fox’s pocket electric lamp, the beating of shod feet on bare boards, and a thousand echoes running allwhither into the heart of the deserted factory—the weird cries of rudely awakened wild-fowl in the darkness without, and—silence.

‘Stiletto’ Dobson, as in a dream, looked up into the keen, gray eyes of Squire Quigley only six inches above his own. The Squire had him on his back, his great weight pressing down the little, squirming smuggler as the

weight of a bulldog pins a stoat. The Squire's great hands held Dobson's wrists as in a vice; his flaxen beard brushed the little man's white locks. Dobson saw the ring of blue-clad men around him, saw the bar-like gleam of the drawn sword-sticks, heard the sharp order from Mr Fox to close in. Then the Squire rose.

'Poaching as usual,' he said, in his deep, ringing voice.

'Pardon me, Squire,' put in Mr Fox, stepping forward. 'I claim the prisoner on a much more serious charge than that.'

Squire Quigley raised one finely arched eyebrow in mild surprise; but there was a touch of haughtiness in it that might have stung a quieter man than Fox.

'Indeed, Fox!' he answered. 'And may I ask what that is?'

'Smuggling,' was the curt reply.

Squire Quigley sat himself down slowly—ay, on the very rubbish which covered Dobson's hastily hidden cartridges sat he. He opened his cigarette-case and carefully chose and lit a cigarette. Then, still with one eyebrow haughtily raised, he looked at the six coastguards and their officer and the gleam of steel among them; he looked at the lithe little form of 'Stiletto' Dobson

covered in dust, sitting forlornly on the rotting floor. Then—and then he burst into a mighty roar of laughter, that ran through the empty rooms and set the web-encumbered rafters rocking to a thousand echoes, and awoke the gulls on the mud-banks outside, so that they set up a clamour of answering cries singularly like mocking laughter out in the night there.

‘Fox,’ he cried, ‘you amuse me infinitely, you and your smuggling bogey-man. I’ve known this old rascal here’—and he pointed to Dobson with a huge outstretched arm, still shaking with laughter—‘some twenty years. Clever poacher I know him to be; a leader of poachers I suspect he is; but a smuggler? Oh, name of twenty fiends! Why, you’re going back to the days of our great-great-grandfathers, Fox. I shall fine this man for poaching next week. Smuggling be sugared!’ And the Squire slapped his huge thigh, and rocked with the crazy building to the tune of his own laughter.

Mr Fox bit his lip. ‘But I have private information leading me to suspect him of gun-running,’ he snapped, savage that he was being thus laughed at like a child before his men. ‘We saw him running away laden with heavy packages.’

'My poor wild-duck, you mean,' cut in the Squire.

'No; packages of weight. Cartridges—Lee-Enfield cartridges. They must be hidden here now,' fairly shouted Mr Fox in his anger.

'Cartridges! Oh dear! oh dear!' The Squire burst out afresh in another bull-like roar. Then he suddenly sobered down. 'But seriously, Fox,' he said, 'one can hardly credit such things in these days of the twentieth century.'

'But I can and will prove it,' burst out the commander of the coastguards, now fairly well jumped out of his grooves, as it were.

'Prove it, then!' snapped the Squire suddenly. 'I have been Squire of Quigley for twenty-five years, and I ought to know something of my own people. I am, in a way, responsible for them. I defy you, Fox, to prove your charge.'

Mr Fox was by this time white in the face with suppressed rage, all the more venomous because before such a great man as the Squire it had to be suppressed.

'Search!' he commanded, swinging round to his men, and spitting out the single word like a cat that has been unwittingly trodden upon. And they—the six that were with

him, and the other six who had just come up —searched with that peculiar, dread, ordered thoroughness which marks our coastguards.

Every board of wall and floor was tapped; every yard of ground the pursuit had covered was gone over at least twice; every foot of mud on either hand was rigidly examined. From head to heel they overhauled Dobson; from sea-wall to ruined factory they worked the ground again, and from floor to roof they ferreted the factory. And all the time Squire Quigley sat upon the heap of rubbish that covered those fatal cartridges, and rocked with laughter or snorted with rage, as the fit took him; and Stiletto stood between two armed coastguards, and wondered if he was dreaming or drunk, or if this was some insane nightmare, from which he would presently awake to find the dawn streaming in at his window.

At last the men gathered in the room where the Squire was still seated. Mr Fox stood in the doorway, pulling his beard and gazing at Dobson as one who could save him from a very awkward position if he could only be forced to speak.

‘Well?’ asked the Squire.

‘Nothing,’ was the curt reply.

And Squire Quigley gave an odd laugh that made Dobson turn and look at him. It

would almost have appeared as if the Squire were on his side, had he not known from bitter experience what a hard man, a 'stickler for justice,' the Squire had always shown himself to be.

When the Squire spoke, however, there could be no doubt as to his attitude in the matter. 'Dobson,' he said sharply, 'this matter of smuggling or no smuggling is no concern of mine. You are released under suspicion. I also release you under suspicion of poaching; but I warn you that the next time you will not be likely to escape so easily. You have been fined for poaching often enough. You go to prison upon the next occasion. You can go, so far as I am concerned.—How about you, Fox?'

'Yes,' growled Mr Fox, 'we can find nothing. He can go; but I am certain in my own mind, nevertheless. I think we will go also, sir. We are disturbing your flight-shooting.'

The Squire turned and took up his favourite hammerless gun. 'Well, I must confess I do not care for my preserves to be disturbed too much, but you have your duty, naturally,' he remarked. 'Call in at the Hall on your way home, and tell them I said you and your men can do with refreshment. Good-night.'

He rose as he spoke and strode out behind the officers of the Crown. Dobson had already departed, but not far; he was hiding in the tamarisks barely three hundred yards away. He saw the coastguards depart one way, and the Squire another. A double shot some distance off ten minutes later told him where the sportsman was located, and he crept back to the ruined factory and removed those deadly cartridges before dawn. It was too risky to leave them there. Perhaps Mr Fox might take a fit into his head to return and make a private search on his own.

Indeed, as 'Stiletto' Dobson entered his back-door in the lone, cold gray of dawn some hours later, Mr Fox, all alone, came to the ruined factory, and began a careful investigation of the place, which lasted him two hours, and told him nothing at all.

III.

It was a cold, hard, blustering evening some three weeks after 'Stiletto' Dobson had been so nearly caught over that little matter of the cartridges. Stiletto was sitting by the fire in his cottage, holding up to the blaze his small feet, clad in those long gray stockings which all men wear who go to their work in heavy sea-boots. Evidently he was settling

down to an evening of ease and a laborious read of the paper. Stiletto read after a style of his own, a slow process involving much movement of the lips and pondering over long words.

Then the garden gate creaked (it always creaked if any one entered by it; Stiletto had seen to that), and Stiletto's cousin, Alby Dobson, strode in at the door. He was not alone, however; another and a different breed of man accompanied him—one well-dressed, keen-faced, dark-visaged.

'It is for to-night,' remarked the newcomer at once, as one who is accustomed to give orders. 'I have brought them in my motor-car. You will get them to the island before morning. There will be four of you—not working together, you understand, for that will increase the risk, but independently. It is the last lot—the completion of the contract. To-morrow you draw your money, enough to keep you, without—er—running contraband, for your life. There.' He flung out a lean brown hand as he spoke. 'Those are the chief's last orders. I had it in his own voice this afternoon. He thanks you all. You have worked well, and deserve your reward—especially you, Dobson.'

Stiletto sat bolt-upright and reached for

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his heavy sea-boots, never far from him. He was a man quick of action, as most soft-spoken men are, and economical of speech.

'Ah,' he said, 'that chief who none of us knaws, and nobody 'ave ever see'd. Just an order through a tube' (but he pronounced it 'toob'), 'and there ye are. Just a voice, as one might say. 'E ain't no fool, 'ooever 'e m' be. But I wonder 'oo t' gracious he is.'

'Ah,' laughed the stranger, sitting down, not without grace, and lighting a cigarette, 'many have wondered that, my friend, and will. Even I do not know—I who am his chief deputy—and never shall.' He turned slowly and gazed out of the tiny window at the threshing trees. 'He may be a native of this town, or of Jericho, or New York. We may see him and speak to him daily, for aught we know;' and he made with his fingernail on the cloth the sign thus, —the treble-barbed arrow-head, by which this chief of smugglers, who preferred to remain nameless, was known to his men.

'Stiletto' Dobson pulled on his heavy boots thoughtfully.

'It'll be dark in fifteen minutes,' he remarked. 'And t' wind'll drop with t' tide. Like as not, if fog comes on, as it may, Mr Fox 'll be tryin' on some o' 'is fancy games,

but I ain't afraid o' 'e. So naw ye knaws.' And he made a gesture with his free hand indicative of the wiping of Mr Fox off the earth.

The deputy rose with a laugh, and, shaking hands, departed. It would appear that, though a gentleman, he loved the game for itself.

Fifteen minutes later Dobson and his cousin left the cottage and went different ways. Half-an-hour afterwards Dobson alone arrived at the shore of the estuary, burdened with his first load of cartridges, and pushed off in his shallow, turtle-backed, cigar-shaped, flat-bottomed gunning-punt, ostensibly to go wild-fowling.

The wind, as he had prophesied, was falling swiftly with the tide. There was no moon as yet, and the silence was the silence of a desert or the boundless ocean. Save for the occasional, sudden, sword-like whistle of wild-ducks' wings overhead, or the passing bugle-like clamour of a 'gaggle' of wild-geese, there was no sound. It was just the night for smuggling, gun-running, and other questionable and risky occupations that thrive not in the light of day.

'Stiletto' Dobson had made four journeys, carrying the cartridges on his back from the

place where they were hidden in the hollow wheat-stack a quarter of a mile or so to the shore, where he placed them in his gunning-punt and rowed them on the falling tide to the little island out in the middle of the estuary. Here, before dawn, a gravel-barge would come, ostensibly to dig gravel—a common enough practice on these harbours—and would take the cartridges out into the English Channel, where they would be transhipped to a steamer whose business it was to run the gauntlet of the friendly Power's cruisers and deliver them where they were most urgently needed, as has already been explained. Dobson saw by the sinking of the piled-up cases within the stack that his companions were working swiftly, as he was himself, each independently from a different point. And now this was the last journey. In his punt he carried the last load.

He noted as he pushed off from the shore, and paddled out craftily on muffled oars, that the wind had dropped, and left a mist fast thickening to a fog. The tide, too, had fallen; there was barely seven inches of turgid water beneath his flat-bottomed punt, though farther out, towards the main channel of the estuary, there would still be water enough. Banks of oozy, glistening mud loomed here and there

out of the fog, ghostly and menacing shadows. Far away a single pounding report rang out suddenly, denoting where Dobson's cousin 'Alby' was making pretence to shoot wild-fowl. And Dobson lifted his gun suddenly and fired at a shadowy flock of widgeon at that moment crossing the moon. A dull splash not far ahead told the smuggler that one, at any rate, of that flock would feed on the still, steely reaches no more. He, too, would tell all whom it might concern that he was plying his legitimate trade.

Then, after picking up the widgeon, he rowed on in silence through the fog. Once or twice he turned his head uneasily. He had a sort of feeling that he was being followed. There were now and then faint splashings in the murk of the fog, but these might have been made by fish—or, again, they might not.

Slowly he made the main channel of the estuary, and turned up it towards the island. In spite of the moon, it was impossible to see anywhere more than a few yards ahead because of the fog.

Suddenly Dobson stopped rowing and 'backed water.' The birds were coming towards him; flock after flock whistled past quite close, or shied at sight of him and beat upwards overhead. A boat was being rowed

down the channel in his direction, frightening up the birds as it came. Nay, more; he felt almost certain now that some one was behind him, too. The sudden cries of the birds a few seconds after they had passed him would suggest that. Perhaps it was his own cousin, however. He knew no coastguard could follow him over the shallow way by which he had come.

They who approached from ahead were different, though. No mere punt this, he knew, by the confusion among the fowl. Moreover, they came quickly—so quickly that in a few seconds he could hear the beat of oars—that short, regular beat which no seaman can mistake; it was the stroke affected by the Royal Navy. They who came were rowing ‘navy stroke’—were, in fact, coastguards.

Dobson spun his light craft about as a whirligig beetle spins in a puddle, and raced up a narrow side-channel, away towards the land. He fled into the arms of the gathering fog, but as he went he heard a sharp hail, inviting him to heave-to at once, and the strokes of the approaching oars quickened furiously.

He knew that he was being pursued by the coastguard cutter, and he did not accept

the invitation to stop. He removed, over a mud-bank and up the small channel, towards land. The boat of the law, being larger, had to make a short *détour* and strike the mouth of the channel where it ran into the main one lower down, but the inspiriting way in which she took the bend and came hissing up into the straight left no doubt as to which was the faster boat. The coastguard cutter, manned by six men, was overhauling the unseen, flying Dobson at every stroke, cutting down his four hundred yards start at every minute.

He might certainly have thrown the incriminating ammunition overboard, but that would have served him little. There was scarcely two feet of water under his punt now, even in the little channel. Soon there would be less. In an hour it would be almost dry. The abandoned cartridge-boxes would stick up out of the water like milestones out of snow. The approaching coastguards were not blind—they must see them; and even if they did not, they would institute a search, and quickly find them. It must be remembered, indeed, that he had fled, fox-like, on the first alarm. Wild-fowlers with a good conscience do not do that. There would be questions asked which he could not

answer. Moreover, he was a suspected man already.

Suddenly 'Stiletto' Dobson stuck his oars hard down in the water, and slid across the channel on a wild 'cant,' 'backing water' for dear life. A long, low, shadowy shape—another punt—had shot out from behind a mud-bank close ahead. Driven by strokes the power of which would have been a marvel if there had been any time to think about it, the punt fairly hissed towards him. So far as Dobson knew, only one man could row like that, or would dare to do so, on these treacherous waters, and that man was Squire Quigley. It *was* Squire Quigley.

Stiletto gave a gasp, and bent hurriedly outboard to fend off the Squire's punt and avert a collision.

'Got your pattens?' muttered Squire Quigley hurriedly.

Dobson nodded. He had still got his hand half raised to strike a blow and avoid a capture.

'Then put them on, man—quick! Winged two geese, and they've flapped across the mud to the big pool close inshore there;' and he pointed with his huge hand to where the sea-wall might be. 'Not enough water for my punt,' he continued, jerking out his

words gruffly and in an enormous hurry. 'Fetch them for me, Dobson, before they get too far. I will stand by your punt.'

'Stiletto' Dobson, taken completely by surprise as he was, was thinking quickly. Here was a chance to get away, it seemed. There had appeared no hope of escape till then. The pursuers were scarcely two hundred yards behind now. In any case the contraband must be captured, he knew, and far better to let it be captured without him, he thought.

In an instant he was hurriedly knotting the rough cords by which he bound the 'pattens,' or mud-shoes, to his feet. He did not speak. In fact, there was no time for words. He just nodded his assent, swung himself out-board, and splashed his way off with great sucking strides in the direction which the Squire had said the wounded geese had taken. He knew the mud-locked pool the gentleman meant well enough—had often shot duck there himself; but he did not pause beside it; he fled straight on towards land. In a few seconds his slim, bent form merged into the deepening fog, and he vanished utterly, swallowed up in the hazy pall and the fine, smothering silence of the night.

In his hurry he had not paused to think—

which was just as well, perhaps, for had he done so, he must have remembered that he had not heard the report of the Squire's gun at all, and he could not have avoided hearing it if that gentleman had fired.

As for the Squire, long before Dobson was out of sight he was already feeling purposefully in the wild-fowler's punt, and removing with incredible swiftness the cases of cartridges to his own. The Squire's punt, be it said, was different from Dobson's in that there were lockers—secret lockers, opened only by a spring—filling the whole of the turtle-back space fore and aft. In these places he hid the cases of cartridges. Then, with a titanic blow of his gun-butt, he drove a hole clean through the bottom of Dobson's punt and sank it in a deep pool in the channel which he knew of from often having caught some large fish in that very spot; for, next to shooting, he loved fishing better than anything. Three huge stones taken from the mud around he placed in the well where Dobson sat to row, in order to keep the punt down. It was thus submerged completely, hidden from view, and would remain so in the hole even at low tide.

Then the Squire swung his own punt slantways across the channel, fired two shots into

the air at nothing, pulled two dead wild-duck out from under his seat and placed them in the water, and, with great deliberation and much flapping of the dead ducks' wings, began to retrieve them, for all the world as if he had only just shot them.

The face of the coastguardsman leaning over the bow of the surging cutter turned suddenly blank, and his jaw fell, as the cutter fairly barged into the long shadow of the Squire's punt.

Mr Fox, at the tiller, stood up, cursing aloud, and the water about them boiled and bubbled as the coastguards, straining on frantically backing oars, sought to check the wild course of the cutter—those oars, at least, which were not lifted straight on end to clear the punt grinding and scraping alongside.

Then the Squire's fair-bearded face peered over the gunwale of the cutter. It was purple, and for the moment speechless—this was a very angry Squire that glared upon them.

'What in thunder are you up to, Fox?' he roared at last.

Mr Fox stifled his curses hurriedly. 'But—but Dobson? Haven't you seen him, sir? He was running contraband—arms. At least, I believe it was Dobson, and I know he came up here,' he cried.

‘Seen him? No. Confound you and your Dobsons and your contraband-running!’ the Squire bellowed. ‘You’ve ruined my brand-new punt with your fly-by-night tricks. I shall make the Admiralty pay for it—what? Seen the man? No. Hang the man and you too, sir! Suppose he’s slipped out on the mud.’

And the Squire appeared to be in imminent danger of there and then having an apoplectic fit—so much so, in fact, that it took the unfortunate officer at least fifteen minutes to soothe the wrathful magnate, and to get him to understand the delicacy of the situation. By which time, of course, Dobson was safely in hiding.

When at last the Squire did appear to grasp things, he was, as Fox put it, too much the other way. He was all for hunting every suspected man down to his cottage and arresting him there and then, and the unfortunate Fox had to waste ten more valuable minutes explaining that, unless they could find Dobson on his punt with arms upon it, they had no evidence that the law would acknowledge at all. Finally, therefore, half-an-hour was wasted before they could manage to persuade the Squire to return to his mansion, and were left free to continue their man-hunt—and it

was by then, of course, too late to hope for success.

Dobson remained in hiding for a week; but when it became quite evident that nothing was known of his little escapade, and that no one had any legal grounds for suspicion against him, he reappeared in the world again. What on earth could have happened to the punt and the cartridges was to him an utter enigma.

It was about a fortnight after that, and Dobson had already drawn his share of the profits from contraband-running, which was sufficient to keep him in comfort for the rest of his days, when it became known in the village of Quigley Harbour that Squire Quigley had let his mansion and estate for four years, and would travel abroad.

Dobson, still excited as a schoolboy over his luck, found occasion to journey fifteen miles by train to Portsmouth on the day Squire Quigley was booked to take his departure 'for forren parts.' Dobson was going to invest in 'one o' them new-fangled, 'igh-power, breech-loadin' wild-fowl guns,' for he meant now to indulge in fowling, not for a living as heretofore, but by way of sport.

He happened to return in the London train, and as he alighted at Travant Junction—

the nearest station to Quigley Harbour—he stepped from his carriage full into the bustle attending the departing Squire. That gentleman, it would seem, was about to journey to London in order to catch the night mail for the Continent. He was surrounded by all the proper accompaniment of valet with dressing-case, footmen with rugs, station-master bowing at the door of his first-class carriage, as may be expected to surround such a fine figure of a man as he looked in his gigantic fur-lined coat.

He did not appear to see the lean little figure of Dobson as he brushed past him. Nor had Dobson any desire to be seen; he wanted to get out of it quickly, and he had good reasons. Thus it happened that when the Squire turned with his hand on the window-strap and one foot on the footboard of his first-class compartment, and called him by name, Dobson acquired a sudden deafness, and did his best to evaporate. One cannot, however, pretend to ignore the stentorian voice of a gentleman six feet two inches tall, and weighing sixteen stone, in a crowded public place for long, before a dozen people draw one's attention to the fact.

‘Stiletto’ Dobson came back reluctantly, and his heart seemed to get up in his throat

and choke him. 'All up,' he said to himself. 'E's bin playin' wid me.'

The Squire's smile, however, as he turned to Dobson after dismissing his retinue, was scarcely the smile of a foe. He pulled a visiting-card from his pocket and held it out to the marshman. 'Do you know who that man is?' he said quietly.

Dobson gave an odd gasp, as if some one had stabbed him in the ribs, and was dumb. All the wrinkles about his weather-beaten face seemed suddenly to deepen and cry aloud to be noticed. His eyes widened, and in them was the look which one may see in the eyes of a trapped wild animal, and in the sudden stiffening of his limbs he also resembled a captured beast. He made no reply, but stared dumbly at the card, for on it was no name at all, but only, in bold black, the design of a treble-barbed arrow. It was the sign of his chief.

'I will tell you who that man is, my friend,' the Squire continued, after a long pause. 'It is the man who saved you when you sold me a basket of smuggled tobacco for a basket of eels; who turned the coastguards from the right scent that night you were captured in the oyster-shed; and who saved you in your last venture of all, when you left your punt

full of rifle-cartridges with me and went looking for wild-geese. There were no geese, my friend'——

At that moment the guard's whistle sounded, and Squire Quigley got into his carriage and shut the door.

'Do you know the name of that man?' he asked almost in a whisper, bending out, his mouth close to Dobson's ear.

'I suppose ye're goin' t' 'ave me arrested whatever I sez,' Dobson snapped, as a trapped beast would snap. 'But I don't knaw 'oo the man is, an' if I did I shouldn't tell ye.'

The train was moving now. Dobson, without thinking about it, was running in order to keep up with the Squire's carriage, and he remembers noting with a sinking heart that a policeman stood beside the ticket-collector between him and liberty. Every instant he expected the Squire to give the word for his arrest; but instead he only leant out of the window, and shutting one eye, smiled. It was the countersign of the smugglers.

THE END.

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